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"OH, SO YOU HAVE COME BACK AT LAST!" THE OLD WOMAN SAID, WITHOUT TURNING HER HEAD.

THE EVIDENCE OF A RING.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

BEST AT LAST.

It was an old house, one of the few left by modern London—an old house with bow windows, which bent over the busy thoroughfare in which the house was situated with every indication of their one day falling down altogether, were it not for the friendly support of the adjacent buildings.

Like all two-century dwellings it had its history; but whatever it had been in the past it was now nothing but a most inconvenient tumble-down structure, with the soft fresh air which had once entered in at the ancient windows now blocked out by bricks and mortar, until only the

smoke from innumerable chimneys could find ingress.

The private door (for the ground-floor had long been converted into a shop) opened on a narrow passage running up one side, and on it was a notice, painted in white letters, to the effect that a day-school was held on the premises for little children, and evening instruction given to those more advanced, or who found it inconvenient to give their time to study at an earlier hour.

But a month had been known to elapse now since the old rickety stairs had creaked beneath the children's feet who regularly attended, and, with the exception of a little girl belonging to one of the inmates, not the sound of a childish voice was to be heard.

In an attic at the top, where the sloping roof scarcely allowed of anyone standing upright, lay a woman of about forty in the last stage of consumption, her bed alone consisting of the forms on which, until she could no longer withstand the ravages of that fell disease, she had daily ranged the tiny pupils whose tuition was the

only source of livelihood which a cruel fate had left her.

On these a couple of mattresses had been so placed as to afford all the comfort it was possible to give the sufferer from such a source; and now that she was too weak to do aught else she would lie hour after hour gazing from the little cracked window up to the mite of blue sky visible from the same.

Near her side was a small table on which sweet-scented roses and summer fruit had been placed by loving hands, filling the tiny room with their fragrant perfume, and speaking of other scenes than its bare, plastered walls to the invalid.

"Oh, my darling! my darling!" she said, endeavouring to raise herself in the bed, as a young girl entered the room, quietly advancing to where she lay. "The time seems so long when you are away, and you look so weary!"

"Never mind me, mother dear!" the latter replied, bending down until her full ripe lips were pressed to the sunken cheek of the other. "I am not tired, dear; but the heat is so

great! But how are you? Do you feel better?"

"Better, darling! No, Maudie, I shall never be that in this world, dearest!" and the elder woman looked sadly into the girl's face—a fair, childish face, with just a tinge of pink on her creamy skin, and then the tightest cord which bound her to life cut into her soul.

"Oh, mother dear, don't say that!" said Maudie, with the tears starting to her beautiful eyes. "You must live for me. I have no one but you. Oh, mother, Heaven would never be so cruel as to take you from me!"

"It seems cruel, my child," Mrs. Overing replied, whilst she passed her thin wasted hands over the sunny locks of her daughter; "but be sure, dear, it is for some wise purpose. But promise me one thing, Maudie, before I go from you for ever."

"I will promise you anything, mother dear! But, oh, don't talk of going yet! Oh, Heaven, why can't I die, too!" and the girl buried her face in the coverlet, as she still knelt by her mother's side.

Maudie Overing had never known but the one parent, and ever since she could remember their life had been one continual struggle for the necessities of existence.

Unlike other children, she had never had companions of her own age; whilst her mother would ever avoid the society of others, and any questioning on her part respecting the father she had never known was always met with the same reply—that he had died when she was but six months old; that he was a gentleman, but had been unfortunate, which was the cause of their present poverty; that ultimately, far from feeling any affection for the dead man, Maudie thought of him but as the cause of all their troubles, and she felt much more love for her mother's only brother, who would send them from the colony where he had settled a ten-pound note each quarter towards, as he termed it, "keeping body and soul together;" but even this was strictly on the proviso that he was to be regarded as a stranger.

The relationship existing between them was one he declared he would never acknowledge, and if ever enforced on his notice even this pittance would be instantly discontinued.

The reason of this strange compact Maudie had no curiosity to fathom until her mother's illness, and then when at times would come across her mind the utter loneliness which would be her lot when that mother was taken from her, her mind would be filled with wonderment as to the cause that all the friends of whom she had heard the former speak never came near them, whilst she herself would shrink from any intercourse with her fellow creatures, ever giving her daughter the reason that, owing to their poverty, she did not care to see those who had known her in prosperity, whilst she had no heart to form fresh acquaintances.

"You die, Maudie!" said the sick woman. "No, no, dear! You are too young, too beautiful; and yet sometimes I almost wish that I could take you with me!"

"But the promise, mother dear!" Maudie asked, after the latter had recovered from a violent attack of coughing, which told her but too plainly how soon they would have to part. "What is it you would have me promise?"

"That you will never mar—" But here another paroxysm prevented the completion of the sentence, and, merely saying "to-morrow," so faintly that it was scarcely audible to the weeping girl, she closed her eyes with the exhaustion subsequent on the attack.

And Maudie still knelt by the bedside until the faintness, which ever followed, had passed, and the dying woman had fallen into a gentle slumber; when, rising from her cramped position, she again resumed the hat she had put on one side when she first entered the room on her return from one of the pupils to whom she gave music lessons, and, gently closing the door behind her, descended the stairs.

On the first landing she met Mrs. Bertrone, who occupied the drawing-rooms.

"I am going a little way to get in some necessities," she said to that lady's inquiries respecting

the invalid. "She is in a nice sleep now; and you will be very quiet, won't you, May?" she added, turning to the little girl who was hanging to the skirts of the former.

"Yes, May will be very good," the child replied, and then Maudie, giving her a kiss, went out into the soft fresh air of the July evening.

It did not take long to complete the few purchases she had to make; but, penned up all day as she had been, giving the music lessons which, now that her mother was so ill, had to be given at the residence of her pupils, Maudie wandered to the gardens which opened on the Embankment, where the breeze from the river seemed to give her fresh strength to meet the duties by night in the sick-room.

She scarcely knew how late it was until the gates were about to be closed. She rose from the seat she had occupied, the summer twilight gathering around her, as she retraced her steps homeward.

She had just ascended the first flight when, stepping on the landing, she met Mr. Bertrone evidently awaiting her, his little daughter with large, frightened eyes clinging round him.

"It was not May's fault; no, it wasn't May's fault, was it, papa?" the child cried, when Maudie advanced. "May was good, she was," and she looked appealingly into the face of the other.

"What does she mean?" Maudie asked, feeling for the first time a conviction, which the expression on the man's face confirmed, that something dreadful had happened.

"Come here," he said, gently leading her from the stairs, which she was about to ascend. "Don't go upstairs."

"In mercy tell me!" she said. "Mother, is she awake?"

And in her excitement she would have pushed past, when, laying his hand upon her shoulder,—

"She will never wake again," he said; "she is gone!"

For the moment Maudie was unable to realise the truth of his words.

"Gone!" she repeated.

"Yes," was the reply. "My wife hearing her groan shortly after you went out, ascended, to find her in a fit, when getting the assistance of the old woman from downstairs she sent for the doctor, but it was too late; she had breathed her last, your name the last on her lips."

"And I away," sobbed the girl. "Oh! mother, mother! my darling, my darling!" and burying her face in the cushions of the sofa to which Mr. Bertrone had led her, Maudie moaned out her great grief, until at last, her strength giving way, she lay back, her eyes closed, the thick, wet fringe resting on her face, as white as that of the dead woman above.

CHAPTER II.

THE AGENCY.

It was some time before Maudie recovered from the swoon into which she had fallen. Her strength had been so overtaken, her nerves so unstrung, that this great sorrow had snapped the last thread of her endurance; and the frightened faces of the Bertrones were looking over her in fear and trembling, when at length her weary eyes unsealed.

"No, no, dear, not to-night," said that kind lady, on her begging to be allowed to see her mother; and feeling too ill to insist she patiently gave way, and was led by the former to her own bed, where for hours could be heard the sobs which broke from her in the still hours of that dreadful night, until thoroughly worn out, sleep at length came to her relief and the bright morning sun was shining in at the tiny window when she again rose to her misery; but not until the last offices had been performed for the dead would Mrs. Bertrone hear of her entering the room where the corpse was awaiting its last narrow bed.

"May little May put dear with de others?" said the child, when the following day she crept up to the side of Maudie, who was about to enter the chamber of death, with some lovely flowers in her tiny hand.

"Yes, darling!" replied the latter, stooping to kiss the baby face, with the hot tears streaming down her own; and then gently opening the door she led her within, when raising the lid of the coffin she looked on the features so dear, now calm and peaceful in their last long sleep.

Fresh green ferns had been placed on the worn and painless window shelf, whilst others were to be seen standing here and there on the table, now covered with a spotless white cloth with roses between shedding their perfume around, and in the midst the beloved face as though moulded in wax, surrounded by that which she treasured so much in life.

"Oh! how kind of you, dear Mrs. Bertrone!" sobbed the girl, turning to where the latter had followed them in, and then fondly kissing her.

That lady led May, who had deposited her roses on the table, from the room, leaving Maudie alone with her dead.

She was scarcely conscious of the time as she remained gazing on the still, white face, when the half-uttered sentence which was to have been completed on the morrow which never came recurred to her memory.

"What was it," she wondered, "that the lips now sealed for ever, would have fain had her promise?"

And as these thoughts passed through her mind, she raised her eyes to where the portrait of a gentleman hung on the bare wall.

It was that of the father whom she had never known, his gaze apparently resting on her, and a feeling that the unspoken words were in reference to him presented itself, and a firm resolve to unravel, if possible, the mystery surrounding him, took possession of her, when replacing the lid over the dead face, she left the room.

A few days later all that remained of Mrs. Overing was consigned to the grave, and Maudie realised the fact that she was indeed alone in the world, with no one to pilot her through its shoals and quicksands.

Their home was almost valueless, but, such as it was, she determined to dispose of as soon as possible.

"And what do you intend doing, dear?" asked Mrs. Bertrone, when she heard of this latter intention.

"I must get a situation as governess, and with the few pounds which I hope to realise provide myself with a suitable wardrobe," Maudie replied, whilst turning over some old music and books; and showing the former the advertisement she had drawn out to be inserted in the *Times* she proceeded with her task.

She had written to her uncle in Australia, telling him of her mother's death, but knew some weeks must necessarily elapse before she could expect any help from that quarter.

Through Mrs. Bertrone she was enabled to sell the few things she possessed to advantage—they found a young working couple, newly-married, only too glad to avail themselves of what they considered a good chance.

The advertisement had brought no good result, and Maudie now determined to apply to a scholastic agency, the time having nearly expired which was to elapse previous to the young people taking possession of their goods, and the rooms also, which they had agreed to rent from the landlord.

London was perceptibly thinning, the bright, lovely days of August drawing those fortunate enough to be able to avail themselves of a change to the seaside resorts and country residences.

"You have been giving daily instruction, you say, and now wish to obtain a situation as resident governess?" the lady of the establishment observed, when Maudie, having carried out her intention, applied at Mrs. D'Alcorn's agency the following morning.

"Yes," she replied, letting her eyes rest on the heavy crease of her black dress. "My mother has lately died, and I have no longer a home."

Her voice trembled, and she lowered her gaze to hide the tears which hung on her thick lashes.

"Do you think you have anything to suit me?" Mrs. D'Alcorn looked intently at the fair, sad face.

"You are very young," she said; "and now—"

days ladies require so much for little salary. Let me see."

And adjusting her spectacles she turned over the pages of a large book, containing several entries respecting situations which were vacant.

"Six pupils, ages ranging from six to fourteen; requirements, English, French, German, music, drawing, and painting; salary twenty-five pounds, and laundress. What do you think of that?"

"German and painting absolutely necessary!" Maudie inquired. "I do not know how to teach either."

"You have never been on the Continent, I suppose?" was the next question.

"No," and Maudie felt her fate was sealed when in reply Mrs. D'Alcorn, removing her spectacles, told her she feared she would have great difficulty in procuring a situation, but she would take her name and address, and do the best she could for her; and then she proceeded to attend to other clients, whilst Maudie, her beautiful eyes blinded with tears, descended the stairs.

As she reached the lower step she became cognizant of the presence of a lady who, with two little girls of eight and five years respectively, had just entered the hall.

"Is this the way to the scholastic agency?" she asked of Maudie, who, endeavouring to hide her emotion, was about to pass out.

"Yes, madam," was the reply, "on the first floor;" and the former, thanking her, was in the act of ascending when a whispered comment from one of the children arrested her footsteps.

"Excuse me," she said, "but are you looking for a situation?"

Maudie raised her tearful eyes to the other's face—a sweet, gentle face which met hers so kindly, and made the tears start afresh at the sound of a voice in sympathy with her feelings.

"I am, madam," she replied, "but my accomplishments are so limited that I fear I shall have much trouble in meeting with anyone who will engage me."

"Well, come upstairs," the lady answered, "and we will hear what you can teach, for Gertrude here has taken a violent fancy to your face," and she laughingly looked down on the golden-haired fairy by her side.

"I want to have a few words with this young lady, Mrs. D'Alcorn," the former said, entering the room where the same was still occupied over her books, and the preliminary fee being paid Maudie was permitted to enter into particulars with the new client.

"And so you have just lost your mother, and are alone in the world?" the latter said, after having asked some necessary questions, and remarking on the sombre black in which she was dressed. "Poor child! Well, I am willing to engage you if you think you would like to come to me. What do you say?"

"Oh! madam, I should be so pleased!" the girl replied; and Gertrude, with little Florrie, looked as delighted as she when it was finally arranged that Maudie was to be taken as governess in the family of Lady Leigh, of Leigh Park, Berkshire.

CHAPTER III.

A REVELATION.

The few days which remained, between the time Lady Leigh, after having applied to the party whom Maudie had given as referee, and that on which she was to enter on her new duties, was occupied by the latter in the arrangement of the home which she had sold, so as to have it in readiness for the new comers, she alone retaining some old books, a workbox, and desk, which, worthless to others, were dear to her, they having been the property of her beloved mother.

"I am going to look over these old papers to-night," she said, indicating the contents of the latter, which was placed open on the table before her, "and then ask you, Mrs. Bertrone, to kindly take care of these things for me. They will be such a trouble to carry about."

"Certainly, dear," was the reply; "they will be perfectly safe with me; and, besides, there is

no telling, you may be back again before you think, when, you know, there will always be a shelter at least beneath the old roof, even if you have to share May's bed."

"You are very kind," was Maude's answer, when, kissing the latter, to whom her mother had said it was time to say good-night, Mrs. Bertrone left her to complete her task.

How faded and old the letters were which tumbled out when Maudie commenced by turning the receptacle in which they had laid for so many years topsy-turvy!

Some were from girl friends, written in the usual gushing style of school-fellows, who vowed eternal friendship, and undying affection until, in the end, other ties presented themselves, and they became drifted from each other on the sea of life.

"It is useless to keep them," she said, tossing these skeletons of the past on one side, when taking up another bundle written in a man's hand she proceeded to read their contents.

There were some of an early date, lover's letters, two years at least before she was born, but all in the same handwriting, and addressed to her dead mother.

They had been carefully arranged, the dates going on until the lover had become the husband, but not one bearing the signature of Overing. Some were signed "your loving George," others husband only, without a name at all; and then came one, in which the writer had evidently been in great trouble, with the surname Hansell, in addition to the other.

It was in answer to one he had had, telling him of the birth of a daughter, and in which he prayed that Heaven would take back the gift that He had given.

Could it be, Maudie thought, that she was the child alluded to? And, if so, what was the dreadful mystery surrounding her? That the letters were all addressed to her mother there could be no doubt, and the date of the baby's birth her own.

In the hope of fathoming the same she unfolded the next; but, when her eyes rested on the heading, the room seemed to swim around her, and, with her heart beating audibly beneath her bodice, she read to the end, her tears adding to the blot on its surface left by the agony of the man who had penned it in the long ago—her only consolation, the same which had come to her dead mother in the last words ever received.

"MY DARLING,—I am innocent, which Heaven in His good time will reveal, and may He in His love watch over you and our darling is the constant prayer of

"YOUR DEVOTED HUSBAND"

"Oh! merciful Heaven!" was Maude's ejaculation, her mind flitting rapidly with every conjecture respecting the crime for which her father had been convicted, for that George Hansell had stood in that relation to her she had no further doubt.

But nothing remained in those old, faded letters which could enlighten her, and carefully consigning them to the place from which she had taken them, after debating in her mind whether it was wiser to do so or destroy them altogether, she glanced curiously over others of less importance, and then safely turned the key on that dread secret of her young life.

"I'll just go up and see if that poor young thing has gone to bed," said Mrs. Bertrone to her husband, when, little May having been put to sleep, they sat down to their evening meal, "for she would just starve herself to death if she were left alone;" and evidently intent on avoiding such a catastrophe, the good little woman quickly ascended the rickety stairs leading to Maude's room, at the door of which she knocked.

But there was no reply, and thinking, perhaps, she had fallen asleep she again applied her knuckles to the panel with the same result, until she made up her mind to enter without further ceremony. But the door being locked on the inside, it resisted all her efforts, and becoming really alarmed she summoned Mr. Bertrone, who was deeply absorbed in the evening paper.

"What is the matter?" he asked, himself

almost as frightened as she at the sight of his wife's white face.

"Why, the door is locked," Mrs. Bertrone answered, "and I've been knocking fit to wake the dead, and no answer. I wish you'd break it open."

"But Miss Overing always locks her door when she goes to bed, doesn't she?" he asked.

"I never knew her to do such a thing," was the reply. "She is too much afraid of fire for that, having often said that this old house would burn like a match-box."

It required but little strength on the part of the former to break the lock; and a scream broke from the woman's lips when, on entering the room, they discovered Maudie lying apparently lifeless on the floor.

"Don't be frightened," said her husband, who, having placed his hand on her heart, assured her she was alive. "She has only fainted," he said. "Fetch a drop of brandy, quick!"

And, after having forced a spoonful of the spirit between the closed teeth of the unconscious girl, whilst his wife chafed her cold hands with vinegar and water, their efforts were soon rewarded when, with a deep sigh and a quivering of the snowy lids, Maudie opened her eyes, surprised at seeing Mr. and Mrs. Bertrone kneeling by her side.

"Do you feel better now?" they asked, helping her to rise.

"Yes, yes!" she answered. "But what a trouble I am! I turned faint all at once, and my head swam, and then I remember falling."

"Yes, dear, and would have lain here all night had not John burst open the door. But you are better now, are you not?"

And Mrs. Bertrone wiped away the tears which were gathering fast in the sad eyes, which rested on her kind face.

"I am all right now," Maude answered.

"Well, I shan't leave you just yet," the other replied.

So, sending John down to his supper, she insisted on helping Maude to undress, saying she would bring her up something to eat when she was comfortably in bed, adding that, as she had to go to Leigh Park on the following day, it would never do to make her first appearance with a face like a ghost.

CHAPTER IV.

LEIGH PARK.

It was not until after taking a last look at their patient, and being assured that she had fallen into a quiet sleep, that the Bertrones decided on retiring themselves; but the following morning spoke but too plainly, in the great black rings surrounding the girl's eyes, the sort of night she had had; for when the first sleep, which the remedies administered by her kind friends had brought to her, had passed she found it impossible to find repose with that dreadful mystery unsolved, which would ever follow her wherever she went, like a grim shadow.

She was thankful that Fate had decreed she should leave London; other scenes and other associations were the only hope she had of preventing her mind from dwelling on a secret which, guarded as it had been by her dead mother all those years, she knew must, indeed, be something dreadful.

At one moment she would feel that the object of her life would be to unravel this mystery, when the next she would reflect what good could it do to unearth the skeleton which had been hidden so long; and, after the first shock was passed, thinking it wiser to follow the latter course, she arose, resolved to carry the same into effect.

The reflection of her face in the dressing-glass caused her to start.

"What would the Bertrones think?" she asked herself.

Dashing a plentiful supply of cold water over her swollen lids and brushing out the tangled masses of her gold-brown hair, in a degree the traces of her grief disappeared, the pallor of her complexion being put down to the attack of the previous evening.

Maude had just completed her toilet when a gentle tap was given at her door, and on her saying "Come in," Mrs. Bertrone entered, bearing a small tray of tea and toast.

"Well, there!" said the little woman. "I never heard you stirring, and thought you would have liked a bit before you got up, for you are not going till the midday train, are you?"

"No, not till 12.30 from Paddington. But how good of you, Mrs. Bertrone, to think of me! I will be down in five minutes."

And Maude warmly kissed the soft cheek of her friend, who, saying she would keep the breakfast hot for her, descended to where little May awaited her.

The morning soon passed, and in the excitement of parting, &c., Maude, in a measure, ceased to remember the cause of her sorrow, and when at last the cab stood at the door which was to convey her to the station she was quite cheerful when the moment came to say goodbye.

"I do believe you are quite glad to leave us," Mrs. Bertrone said, in mock reproach, whilst assisting her to put on her things; but the little woman told her husband afterwards she could have bitten her tongue out for saying such a thing when she saw the tears rise to the beautiful eyes of the girl, and how they came tumbling down her pretty face when little May clung round her neck at the last.

Maude was too much occupied during her journey with the thoughts which filled her mind of the events of the last few weeks to take much notice of her surroundings, and not until someone asked her if she objected to the carriage window being open did she know who her fellow-travellers were.

Then, raising her head to answer in the negative, she became aware of the presence of an old gentleman sitting opposite, whilst two middle-aged ladies were carrying on an animated conversation at the other end.

The former was a man between sixty and seventy, his grey hair leading one to think he must be nearer the latter than the former, whilst his face appeared much younger.

But unwillingly Maude found herself studying his countenance without knowing what it was that made her do so, whilst his features seemed to hold over her a peculiar fascination.

It was not a pleasant face, and yet one would have been puzzled had they been asked to define where the unpleasantness arose, save for a certain cold glitter in the grey eyes, which spoke of a latent cruelty, and which caused the colour to suffuse the cheeks of Maude when, unwittingly, he caught hers fixed upon him, and quickly turning to the window, she became intent on the prospect of waving corn and busy harvestmen.

"Are you going far?" he asked. "You look quite tired already," when once more she withdrew her head as another train rushed by.

"No," was her reply. "A little beyond Windsor—Leigh Park."

"Leigh Park!" he repeated, with a smile; "then we shall be companions to the end of the journey, for that is my destination also. Of course you will have friends to meet you?"

"I have no friends," Maude replied; "but doubtless, someone will be there to conduct me to the Park."

"The Park!" he said; "and no friends!" seemingly unable to understand. "I hope you will not think me rude if I ask you to explain."

"I am an orphan," she answered, falteringly, "and I am going as governess to Lady Leigh's little daughters."

"Well, I hope you will be happy," was the rejoinder. "Lord and Lady Leigh are the nicest people imaginable; in fact, we are great friends, my place adjoining theirs. I am Sir Montague Israel, and I hope, my dear young lady, I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again. And your name?" he asked.

"Is Maude Overing," was the reply, Maude regretting the next moment that she had gratified the old man's curiosity by telling him anything about herself.

But it was too late now; and, having arrived at their destination, he assisted her to alight, staying by her side until a servant in Leigh livery,

touching his hat, asked if she was the young lady for the Park.

"What a lovely place!" thought the girl, to whom the country was a novelty, as seated in the low carriage sent for her she was driven between leafy hedges, whilst the branches of beech and chestnut formed a canopy overhead, the gilt surmounting the gates of the Park itself flashing beneath the rays of the afternoon sun, when the same, being quickly opened by the lodge-keeper, whose abode was a picture in itself, they emerged on a drive, on each side of which extended a sward of velvet green far as the eye could reach, dotted with glaucous oak and elm, with here and there trees of less magnitude, the boughs of which bent until their luxuriant foliage kissed the grass and formed a shelter for the sheep grazing beneath them.

Maude felt very nervous when descending from the carriage. She was ushered into a large entrance hall where servants in silk stockings and plush breeches appeared to consider her decidedly beneath their notice; and she felt a considerable relief when, a few moments later, she was ushered into a pretty room looking on to a garden at the back, and on being announced by James as "the young person from London," found herself in the presence of an elderly woman, whose black satin dress, gold chain and lace cap, stamped her as someone above a menial.

She was the housekeeper; a glad, welcome smile on her kind face, as, removing her spectacles and putting down the book she had been reading, she advanced to give a hearty welcome to the new governess.

"Poor thing," she said, "and so young!" looking down at the black dress and heavy crape in which the young girl was attired. "My lady told me all about you—an orphan. But don't cry, my dear!" and she kissed away the tears which her sympathy had caused to arise, telling Maude how fortunate she might think herself in having met her ladyship. "She and the little girls had gone to a garden party," she said, alluding to the latter, "but had left instructions that she was to be made comfortable; so you just go to your room for a wee bit," she continued, kissing the girl kindly, "and then you shall have some tea here, and be quite refreshed and bonny by the time her ladyship returns."

So ringing the bell Mrs. Felton gave directions to the damsel who answered it to show Miss Overing to her room. "Ring the bell, dear, when you are ready," she added, "and then Mary will lead you back to me," and she smiled, "for this house is almost like a town, and the chances are you would lose yourself between one corridor and the other," a chance which Maude almost deemed a certainty, when following her guide she was shown into a pretty room on the second floor in the front of the house.

"I have brought up hot water," the girl said. "Ring when you are ready, miss," and then closing the door behind her, Maude was alone.

Alone, but with what different surroundings to those which she had but a few short hours back left behind her!

The soft, pure air came in at the open windows, bringing with it fresh life; and looking without, as far as the eye could range was one continuance of hill and slope, the bright August sun enhancing the beauty of its emerald surface, whilst she could faintly discern in the distance the silver streak of a piece of water shimmering beneath its rays, and then losing it in the density of the far away foliage.

On the right through the trees she could see another mansion nestling amid the same, which she considered must be the residence of the old Jew, and was about to turn aside to complete her toilet when the sound of carriage wheels attracted her attention, and, looking to see whence it proceeded, she became aware that Lady Leigh and her little girls had returned.

CHAPTER V.

THE LOVER'S WALK.

MRS. FELTON was awaiting Maude, when, a few moments after, she was again led by Mary to the housekeeper's room.

"Yes, my dear, I heard the carriage drive up," she said, in answer to the former's remark that Lady Leigh had returned; "but you need not hurry, for I don't suppose her ladyship will see you now before dinner, and that is sure not to be over till nine o'clock or after," but just then the butler came in whom Mrs. Felton introduced as Mr. Sampson, and whispering something in that lady's ear which called forth the exclamation, "You don't say so!" he as quickly left the room, after which the housekeeper, begging to be excused, soon followed, and when she returned two men accompanied her.

"Friends of mine, come up from London, my dear," she explained, and then after the men had given a stare, "hoping they found her well," in response to Mrs. Felton's invitation to draw up to the table, they did so, the same chatting away as affably as though they had been the friends of a lifetime, notwithstanding that Maude thought she could detect a certain uneasiness on the part of the former, which, strive as she would, she could not hide, and just then the door opened.

"His lordship has just come in," Mr. Sampson said, on re-entering the room, and taking his place at the table, "but it is useless to trouble him to-night;" and then he looked at the two men, who, saying they were satisfied if he was, went on with their repast, evidently enjoying with a gusto the delicious butter and cream supplied from the home dairy.

It was not long before the first sounding of the gong was the signal for the butler to take his departure, when Mrs. Felton, asking Maude if she would like to see her little pupils whilst her ladyship was at dinner, the latter assented, and she led the way to the day nursery, leaving her friends without any ceremony.

"Now, you must be very good children!" she said, as on opening the door the little girls rushed to meet her; but on seeing a stranger behind they became more shy until Maude, asking if they did not know who she was, they timidly advanced, placing their hands within those of the former, whilst they raised their faces for a kiss; and then, finding how readily she entered into their baby talk, new dolls and new toys were brought forward for her inspection.

"I will love no better than her," said Florrie, throwing aside the former favourite in the shape of a wax doll with a very pink complexion and fair wig, and seating herself on Maude's knee, asked her if she could tell pretty stories like nurse; after which the histories of Jack and the Beanstalk and other nursery heroes were discussed until nurse, saying it was time to dress them to go down to dessert, history of that sort was put on one side for the time being, and not until their return from the dining-room under the charge of the former was Maude informed that her ladyship desired to see her in the drawing-room.

When she entered the latter, Lady Leigh was seated by an open window, her face looking towards where but a short time before the bright August sun had gone down in all his splendour, and Maude thought her sweet face looked more careworn than it did on that first day when she had met her at Mrs. D'Alcorn's office, but brightening up at her approach.

"I am afraid you must have thought it very unkind that I was not at home to receive you when you arrived!" she said, holding out her hand; "but I knew Mrs. Felton would do everything to make you comfortable. So now that we have a few moments before the gentlemen come in, you must tell me what kind of a journey you had from town. Had you any fellow-travellers?"

Maude sat down on the sofa in the place her ladyship motioned her to, feeling as much at home as though she were seated on Mrs. Bertrone's old horsehair one.

"I had a very pleasant journey," she answered; "but, you see, the distance is so short, and there were two ladies in the same compartment, and an old gentleman, Sir Montague Israel, who told me he lived near you, my lady."

But my lady did not appear at first to notice the implied question except by a gesture of annoyance; but after a few moments,—

"That horrid old man," she said. "Yes, he

was quite true, that was his house which she could see on the right amid the trees," and she pointed to the spot, saying under her breath, "she wished they had never seen him."

Then they turned to other subjects, and at Lady Leigh's request Maude advanced to the piano, where she sang and played until the door opened and the gentlemen entered.

Lord Leigh was many years older than his wife, his dark hair already sprinkled with grey, his countenance stern, almost morose, a smile like a rift in a storm-cloud only to be seen when addressing the former.

"Miss Overing—Florrie and Gerrie's new governess, dear!" said the latter, on his lordship advancing, and then having acknowledged the introduction, Maude was further introduced to Captain Beyzone, his nephew. "Now, Bertie, you will have someone to practise duets with," Lady Leigh said, smilingly, addressing the latter. "Miss Overing has a sweet voice; and, would you believe it," she continued, now speaking to Maude, "he declares I can't slug a note!" an assertion contradicted by the young officer himself, who declared the soft impeachment rested the other way.

But unable to refuse, much as she would have wished to have done so, Maude responded to her ladyship's desire that they should try their voices together, re-seating herself at the piano, until after a time, pleading fatigue, she begged to be allowed to retire.

The next morning she commenced her duties in true earnest as instructress to the little girls. When the morning lessons concluded, it was arranged that she should take her pupils for a ramble, much to the delight of the latter.

"We will show you where de peetty birdies make dere nests," said little Florrie, running up to where Maude, already dressed, was awaiting them.

"Well, make haste, and get on your hats," she said, and whilst they left her for that purpose she thought she should like to see Mrs. Felton, when entering the housekeeper's room in that hope, she was surprised to find the two men still in occupation of the same.

"Good morning, miss," they said, but resenting their familiarity, Maude merely excused herself on the ground she thought to see Mrs. Felton, and shut the door behind her.

The children were soon ready, and having kissed Lady Leigh were skipping down the terrace steps, when seeing someone advancing in the opposite direction they ran back, clinging to the side of Maude.

"Oh! dat hor'd man; Florrie afraid!" cried the child.

And Gerrie explained that she was always like that whenever they met Sir Montague, who, coming forward, held out his hand to the former, when she was endeavouring to still the child's screams.

"I hope you are quite well," he said. "I see you are already installed in your new duties but I am afraid that young lady will prove rather refractory," and he turned to where Florrie was yet crying out that she did not like that bad man, when he passed on.

Whether he understood what the child said or no it was impossible to say, but, Maude quickly recovering herself, they went cheerfully on, and were soon without the Park gates, Maude as delighted with the fresh, new scene, as the children were to show her the country woods and lanes around their home.

Chatting and laughing they wandered on until they came to an opening, where uncut hedges, overgrown with bramble and wild rose, grew each side of a lane, the grass of which seemed as fresh and soft as though a human foot had never trod it beneath, whilst the songs of birds were heard resounding through its winding extent.

"Oh! let us go down here," Maude said; "see how bright and green it looks!" but to her astonishment, when she would have carried her wish into effect, neither of the children would stir.

"No! no!" they cried; "don't, Miss Overing, please don't!" running in an opposite direction.

"There is a ghost down there," Gerrie making

this assertion in a whisper, when the former had rejoined them.

"A ghost, you foolish child!" she said; "there are no such things. Who said so?"

"Nurse," the child replied.

"Then nurse ought to be ashamed of herself to talk such nonsense," she answered, and telling them they had better return home, they were about to do so when emerging from the haunted lane they saw Captain Beyzone advancing towards them. "The very walk I wished to have taken," Maude said, after returning the Captain's salutation, "but these children have been frightened with some stupid story about a ghost, and I thought they would have gone into fits when I asked them to come with me."

The Captain laughed, saying it was too bad to put such rubbish into children's heads, and that his uncle would be very angry did he know of it; and then telling them to run on he offered his arm to Maude, conversing on different topics until they were once more within the park gates.

"Did you want to see me, Miss Overing?" the housekeeper said, when meeting Maude on the stairs, who a few moments after was ascending to her own room, they accidentally met. "My friends told me you had been looking for me."

"Oh, it was nothing particular," the girl answered, "only I was waiting for the children, and I thought I should like to have a chat with you."

"Well, come and have it now, dear," was the rejoinder. "Miss Gerrie and Florrie will be having their tea in the nursery, and you may as well have yours with me."

And a short time after Maude was with Mrs. Felton in her private room, where a *recherche* little tea had been provided.

"Mr. Sampson is not at home," the latter said, "so we shall have it all to ourselves."

"And your friends—are they gone, too?" Maude asked.

"Oh, yes; old Montie soon settled their business," Mrs. Felton replied, quickly, as quickly adding, whilst in her confusion she put sugar into the teapot and the tea into the cream jug; "my friends did you say, my dear! Yes, they had to be back in London, for business people, you know, can't be long away."

And then the subject was changed, when asking Maude how she enjoyed her walk, the latter told her of the children's aversion to enter the green lane, and the reason they gave.

"That was Miss Florrie's nurse, I'll be bound," Mrs. Felton said, "who told them. Francis" (referring to the head nurse) "would know better."

"And is there any truth in the story?" Maude asked.

"About the ghost! No, dear, only what foolish people say. But there was a murder committed in that lane—the lover's walk," they call it. It must be eighteen or nineteen years ago now; but I will tell you all about it another time," she said, as Mary knocked at the door to say Lady Leigh was inquiring for Miss Overing, who was to go at once to her ladyship's boudoir.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OCCUPANT OF THE COTTAGE.

It was now three months since Maude first entered Leigh Park, and never for one moment had she reason to regret the fate which had thrown her in the path in which her lot had been cast.

With Lady Leigh she had become as necessary as light and sunshine were to her ladyship's existence, whilst with the children she was very near incurring the jealousy and dislike of Francis, by the way in which they had transferred their affections from her to herself.

Captain Beyzone still lingered beneath his uncle's roof, notwithstanding that his leave had almost expired before the partridge shooting had commenced, which latter gave him an excuse for asking an extension of the same, bringing it very near to Christmas, to spend which at the Park he had the conscience to apply to his commanding officer for a further extension yet.

But the shooting never interfered with the practice, which was continued daily, he having, as Lady Leigh declared, greatly improved since Maude had taken him in hand, after that first evening in which they had sung together, the former little dreaming of the romance which was being enacted before her eyes.

The days were growing very dull and miserable, the woods silent, save for the rustle of the dead leaves as they were swept along by the cold, bleak wind.

But the weather must have been very bad which would have prevented Maude from taking her accustomed walk, sometimes accompanied by one or both of her little pupils, but oftentimes alone, when she could not be prevailed upon to be one of the party in the carriage.

To explore the extensive grounds was her greatest delight, ever finding something new in the discoveries she made.

"I shall just come and see where it is you get to," Bertie had said, when on one of these occasions she started for a solitary ramble, Gerrie and Florrie kissing their hands to her from the carriage window whilst he stood on the steps of the hall door, with his watch in his hand, adding if she were not back by a certain time he should follow on.

It seemed decidedly miserable, Maude thought, as she wandered her way through a shrubbery where above her head the wind sighed and sighed in the bare branches, to a gate which led her on the main road, when, hastening her steps, she felt glad to emerge into the open.

"I could not have been cooped up in a closed carriage to-day for the world," she said, removing her hat that the November wind, which was now blowing a gale, might kiss her forehead and play with her gold-brown hair.

But Maude was unconscious of all but a sense of evil, which appeared to have followed her throughout the day; and, endeavour to throw it off as she would, she failed.

But, wandering on until she neared the green lane down which the children could not be prevailed upon to go, she determined to explore it to the end.

It looked very sad and gloomy now—gloomy enough to have been the silent witness of no end of horrors; but the grass was soft and green where it was not hidden by the dead leaves.

Maude was in that humour that, had she been sure of seeing a deed of blood perpetrated before her eyes, she would have gone on.

But this lane was not unlike any other country lane, save for the little it was frequented—so little that even the birds appeared wilder there, and the rabbits started right and left at the sound of a human voice.

That anyone else should have chosen this path never entered her mind, and she was unable to suppress a start when, raising her eyes, she beheld a gentleman advancing, and had but just time to replace her hat when Sir Montague stood beside her.

The antipathy she had always had towards him did not decrease when, fixing his cold grey eyes on her, he asked how she came to be wandering about alone.

"Because I prefer walking to driving," she replied; "and, never having been in the country until I came to Leigh Park, it always seems I am discovering something new."

"Well, don't be discovering too much, young lady," he said, a significance in his tone quite unaccountable to Maude, who, anxious to rid herself of his company, held out her hand, saying it was too cold to stand long talking.

But he took no notice of her action further than to say that, as it was growing late, she had better let him accompany her to the Park gates, a proposal she at once declined.

"Thank you very much, Sir Montague," she said; "but I am determined to see the end of this lane before I go back."

"And why?" he asked, turning on her with that cruel look he could not control, when, seeing the astonishment depicted on her countenance, he as quickly changed his tone. "Don't be a foolish girl," he said. "There is nothing to be seen more than you see now—a long, green, winding

strip of moss, bordered on each side by brambly hedges—there, won't that do!"

And he would have led her from the same, but the strange tone of his voice and his stranger look made her more anxious than ever to carry out her intention, till, finding all attempts to dissuade her useless, he merely raised his hat, and wished her a pleasant walk.

As the old Jew had said, it was a long, winding way, and Maude had made up her mind to return, the short November afternoon growing darker each moment, when, looking up at the heavy sky, she became conscious of smoke curling up from some chimney, telling of a habitation of some kind being in the vicinity; and, curious to know who it was living in that secluded spot, she ventured on still further, when the storm which had threatened so long began, and, growing larger as they became thicker, the snow-flakes came dancing through the air.

It was a cottage, lying back a little amid the trees, which in summer time entirely hid it from view; and in the hope that the snow would soon abate Maude made up her mind to ask shelter of whoever was within.

To her repeated knocks there was no response until, gaining courage as the weather became worse, she tried the door, which opened easily to her touch.

The room on to which it led was paved with large, square red bricks, whilst the walls, on which hung some hideous coloured pictures, were devoid of any papering.

Two wooden chairs were placed on each side of an old-fashioned bureau.

In the centre was a wooden table, dirty and coverless; whilst on a low stool by the fire sat an old woman, apparently asleep, her shrunken hands placed on her knees, whilst her head drooped and bobbed until each moment she appeared in danger of falling.

Maude stood for some moments gazing on this strange sight, her entrance having had no effect in waking the sleeper, until, muttering something, the purport of which was inaudible, with a start she opened her eyes.

"Oh, so you have come back at last!" the old woman said, without turning her head.

Then she began rocking herself to and fro, after which she again rubbed her eyes and turned round, as though to assure herself she was not alone.

"It is snowing so hard, I thought you would let me rest here till the storm has passed," Maude said.

"Lor! a mercy!" said the old woman. "You must excuse me, miss, but I had fell asleep, an' never heerd ye enter."

Then, rising with difficulty, she brought forward one of the wooden chairs, dusting it with her apron before she offered it to her visitor.

Telling her not to trouble herself, Maude availed herself of the rest, feeling convinced now that the words were but those of a dream which the former had uttered on her first entering.

"And you live all alone here!" she asked, when, accepting the invitation given her, she drew her chair near the fire.

"Well, yes, miss; 'ceptin' Jim, an' he's out most times," was the reply; and then she went on to tell that how Jim was her grandson, "an' as fine a lad as ever walked in two shoes; but you see, miss," she added, "I'm an old woman, an' not much company for the likes o' him," as though apologising for the absent Jim's neglect. "But may I make so bold as to ask how you came down this 'ere lane, miss, for there ain't many as does?"

And Maude began to relate how it had long been her wish to explore the same, adding that at the Park, where she was governess, they told her it was haunted, making her the more anxious to do so, when her eyes fell on a silver-headed cane standing by the chimney-corner.

Evidently the occupant of the cottage had had a visitor there lately, or Jim was the possessor of a valuable walking-stick, she thought, when, her curiosity becoming excited, she lifted the same from its position, not until she had read the

name of the Jew Baronet engraved on the silver speaking to the woman of her discovery.

"Some one has left his stick behind him, has he not!" she said, handing it to the latter.

"Lor, yes!" was the reply; "it's the old gentleman's. He will be in a way!" and she put it carefully on one side for Jim to convey to the rightful owner.

"So folks say the lane is haunted, do they, miss!" she asked. "But that's only idle talk, though what they brought me home that night will be present wi' me till death!" and, raising her wrinkled hand, she covered her face, as though to shut out some fearful sight. "My poor girl dead—murdered and hidden—until, when they brought me her cold body, I scarcely knew mine own."

"Was it your daughter who was murdered?" Maude asked.

"Yes, miss," the old woman answered, the tears running down her furrowed cheek. "Yes, miss, an' when they brought her in I cursed the hand that did the deed, an' said her spirit should never rest till her death had been avenged."

"And was her murderer brought to justice?"

But Maude had to repeat the question before the other, who was rocking herself to and fro, appeared to hear, when starting up like a mad woman, she shrieked:

"Yes, yes, he was hanged, hanged by the neck, till he was dead, like her;" when becoming more calm, she continued, pushing aside the grey hair which in her excitement had fallen over her forehead, "It was close on two year, an' then a ring she was a-wearing on the fatal night was found in his possession, and they brought it home to him—George Hansell—as clear as day."

"George Hansell! did you say!" the girl screamed, hastily rising. "It is not true; let me go, let me go," and before the old woman could hinder her Maude was out in the growing darkness, the bitter wind, unheeding the snow-flakes gathering around her, regardless of all, whilst she rushed from the precincts of that dreaded spot; but the name which kept for ever sounding in her ear—George Hansell, her father.

CHAPTER VII.

REMORSE AND RUIN.

THEN this was the mystery surrounding her father, which had been so religiously kept from her, thought Maude, as she hurried onwards, uncertain in her excitement what course to pursue.

Was she, in whose veins ran the blood of a murderer, fit to be the companion, the instructress of little girls, who had so entwined themselves around her heart! How could she tell Lady Leigh the reason she could no longer be an inmate of her home! And then, Bertie, dearer than all, how could she break it to him, that on her head there rested the curse of Cain!

No, no! they would all turn from her; she knew they would. Mrs. Bertrone was the only one to whom she dare appeal in her great trouble; it was to her she had confided the deed enclosing her dread secret; it was to her she would fly in this her hour of misery.

She had reached the gate now, from which she had but a short two hours back emerged, unconscious of the sword hanging over her head but by a single hair, and here she paused. She could just catch a glimpse of the house beyond, now lighted up, gleaming within her the kind hearts which even now would be growing anxious for her safety.

To linger longer, the temptation would be too great, and she would, hiding from them all she had learned, re-enter the doors which would open but too gladly to receive her; and with the hot tears blinding her to the little light which yet remained, she attempted to turn, when her limbs trembled so that she had to lean against the gatepost for support, and then came a sound like the surging of waters in her ears, the earth appearing to revolve beneath her feet, and unconsciousness came to her relief.

"Maude, dearest, look up, what is it, my

darling!" These were the words which broke on her returning senses, when Captain Bayzone, who had found her lying motionless on the cold, white ground, had lifted her light form until her head was resting on his shoulder, as he knelt there in the bitter cold by her side; but not until his warm breath fell on her cheek—not until she felt his kisses on her icy lips—did she awaken to the reality of her suffering, when her father's crime like a grim spectre, with outstretched arms, stood between her and her heart's love; and then, in her agony of soul, clinging wildly to the man she loved so fondly, for one brief moment she drank in the bliss of his caress; she drew his encircling arms around her faster, and then with a startling cry like that of a wounded deer she drew herself from his embrace.

"Don't touch me," she cried; "don't come near me!" and she made a last great effort to flee from him, as rising to her feet she staggered forward. It was the struggle of a moment, and then as one dead she fell to the earth.

To bear her unassisted to the house was impossible, and nothing remained to Bertie but to hasten back with all speed to summon help.

A hasty explanation of how matters stood; servants were speedily sent to convey the poor girl within. She was still insensible, being in that state when she was placed on her own bed awaiting the doctor's arrival.

"She has received some frightful shock to the system," the latter said; "she must be kept extremely quiet, or he would not answer for the consequence;" and after giving directions to the nurse who had been appointed to the sick-room, took his leave.

The next morning Maude was in a high fever, raving of murder and the green lane, until Mrs. Felton, who went up to see her, declared she must have seen the ghost, and it had turned her brain.

Later in the day the old Baronet called, and being told of the governess's strange attack, related how that he had met her in the "lover's walk," and had endeavoured to persuade her not to go any further, as it was then getting dark; but a strange, sad, worn look came to the face of Lord Leigh when he heard from his wife of the girl's wild fancies.

"Was that the real name of the man who killed the girl in the lane?" she asked him, after descending from the sick-room, where Maude's mind wandered on, always the same story—George Hansell and the murdered girl.

"Yes, dear!" Lord Leigh answered; "that was the name of the poor fellow who suffered for the crime. I believed him innocent. I am sure he was; but it is so long ago, how should a child like that know anything of it!"

"I don't know," was Lady Leigh's reply; "but you surely don't believe he was her father!" and her ladyship shuddered as the thought crossed her imagination.

"I should think it most unlikely, so don't worry yourself on that score," was his lordship's response; "but here comes Bertie, with a face like a mute at a funeral; for Heaven's sake try and cheer him up," and Lord Leigh left the room as the former entered.

"How is she!" was his first question, when the door had closed on his uncle; for Bertie had not yet had the courage to tell the latter that he had plighted his troth to a penniless governess, of whose antecedents he knew nothing; but with Lady Leigh he always felt sure of sympathy in whatever he confided to her hearing, and on that afternoon, when Maude had been brought in as dead, she had guessed the secret which until then Bertie had so rigidly guarded.

"I am quite at a loss to understand what could have been the cause of her sudden attack!" her ladyship answered, after having informed him there was little or no improvement; and then she related to him the girl's strange ravings and Sir Montague's information that he had met her in the lover's walk that afternoon.

A fortnight passed thus, when once again Maude opened her eyes with the light of reason; and then when the nurse, in answer to her inquiry, told her how long she had been ill, she begged to see Lady Leigh.

"May I see you alone!" she asked, when the

latter approached her bedside, looking with such pleading in her large eyes, that when, in compliance with her wishes, the nurse was told she could leave the room for awhile, her gratitude found vent in the tears which coursed each other down her sunken face.

It was a full hour before her ladyship emerged from the sick-chamber, and then there were traces of emotion on her countenance, whilst Maude appeared more calm, more composed, after having unburdened her mind of its dread secret.

She would never, she had told the former, have entered her house, had she known whose child she was; and then she commissioned her to take her parting words to Bertie. She would not, she could not see him again, it would break her heart; he had the world before him, and would in time forget; whilst she would live on, loving him and him only, to the end, and then begging that, unconscious of who she really was, the little girl might be allowed to kiss her for the last time before she went away, which she was anxious to do as soon as she was able. With that promise she became more reconciled to her sad fate.

Several letters passed between Sir Montague and Lord Leigh during the time that Maude lay ill; and on one occasion, when the former had called, angry words were heard to pass between them, in which the voice of his lordship was raised to its highest pitch, telling the other he could do his best and his worst—anything would be heaven to the torture of mind he was enduring now; and then the Jew was shown from his presence with that cold, cruel glitter in his eyes, speaking of the mischief lurking within his heart.

It was a bitter cold day, a sharp frost having covered the ground with a sheet of ice where the hard-trodden snow still remained, and the horse on which the Baronet had ridden had become restless and impatient whilst awaiting his master.

"Scarcely safe for the old gentleman I should think!" said the groom, who, having assisted him to mount, was quickly on the back of his own horse in readiness to follow, after having thus addressed the servant who saw them from the door, when the same, only too glad to shut out the cold air, quickly closed the latter.

"What is it that brings that horrid Jew here so often?" Lady Leigh asked of her husband, when, that same evening, they were together alone in the pretty drawing-room, and she laid her hand caressingly on his shoulder.

"He shall never cross the threshold of this house again whilst I am in it," was the reply; and then, leaning his head on his hands, he became wrapt in thought.

"That poor girl upstairs, dear, is she better?" he said, after a while, breaking the silence. "I have been thinking it over, Bertie. I don't see why we should send her away, after all. Besides, we shall be leaving England shortly, and I am sure you would prefer to have her with you."

He had not raised his eyes, which still remained fixed on the burning coals, whilst the announcement that they were to leave Leigh Park came so suddenly on his wife that she almost dropped the dainty china cup filled with the coffee she was drinking.

"Leave Leigh Park!" she exclaimed. "Why, dear, you never mentioned it before! Is there anything particular to call you away?"

He did not answer for the moment, considering within himself how he was to break to this gentle woman the dread truth. How could he tell her of the ruin in which they were involved—that the man whom he had vainly said should never enter his doors could in a few days—nay, hours—turn them adrift beggars!

It was true he yet held one card; but of what avail was that? It could never remove the remorse which was eating into his soul for the part he had played in the past.

But his wife's voice, repeating the question she had asked, recalled him to himself, and he had made up his mind to tell her all, even if by so doing he lost that which was dearer to him than life, her love, when a furious ringing at the outer bell arrested his speech, and he started to his feet in impatience to learn the cause.

"Sir Montague has met with a serious accident, my lord," a servant said, on entering the room, "and, not being expected to live till the morning, has sent to request that your lordship will see him immediately."

Lord Leigh turned, as the man retired, to where his lady still sat, her face white as marble, when, stooping to kiss her, he said—

"I little thought this would be the end when I declared he should never enter this house again. I will go, Bertie, for his time may be short. And may Heaven be merciful to him, for that man has much to answer for," he added, when, ringing to give directions that the carriage should be brought round at once, he proceeded to prepare for his visit to the chamber of death.

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER EIGHTEEN LONG YEARS.

It was but a few hundred yards which divided Leigh Park from the mansion of Sir Montague, but the evening was so cold that Lord Leigh was glad to wrap the furs around him as the carriage rolled out of his own gates, to enter in the space of five minutes those of the former.

A servant was already awaiting his arrival, having received instructions to lead him without any delay to the Baronet's chamber.

Although suffering the acutest pain he insisted upon being propped up with pillows when his lordship approached his bedside, giving orders that they should be left alone, after a large tin box had, according to his directions, been placed within his reach.

His face was very pallid, around which his white hair hung, whilst on every feature was depicted the extreme suffering he was undergoing.

"There is no time to talk of that," he said, when his lordship asked him respecting his accident. "Let us keep to the subject of our last interview for the present," he added, in the old business tone to which he had been accustomed.

"As you will," was the curt reply. "I shall remain unaltered in my determination."

It was Lord Leigh who spoke, when the other turned fiercely on him, his cruel eyes gleaming.

"You mean you will denounce him!" he cried, "and after eighteen long years drag my boy to suffer a felon's death. Oh! Sydney, my son—my son!" and the old man, groaning in his bodily pain and mental agony, buried his face in his hands.

Cruel, heartless, and vindictive as he had ever been there yet remained the one soft place in his heart—the great love for his son, to hide whose crime he had perjured his soul, and had allowed another to die in his stead.

"No, not that," Lord Leigh replied, feeling at the moment even pity for that aged sinner. "Sydney is safe, but I will not allow this young girl's life to be shadowed when a word from me can assure her of her father's innocence. Let him but allow me to tell her the story in my own way, and I will vouch for his life with my own. Where is he now?"

"In Belgium," was the response.

"Then let him remain in the security he now enjoys. I will never disturb it, revealing to Maude Overing alone the part I reluctantly played in that dreadful past. Have you anything more to say?"

"Yes," he said, with difficulty reaching towards the box, and opening the same, when he took from within some papers tied with red tape, with "Leigh Park estate" written plainly on the outside.

These he held towards his visitor.

"Take them," he said; "it is my legacy to you—the mortgage, deeds, and securities—by which I might have enriched my son, and made you, Rudolph Leigh, a beggar. But his life was in your hands, and you have spared him. May Heaven bless you, and reward me for the only good action I ever did," when unlocking the box he pushed it from him, and fell back like one dead.

But it was only a fainting fit occasioned by the

agony he was undergoing, and when it had passed he held out his hand to Lord Leigh.

"Good-bye!" he said, and the latter grasped it for the last time.

The morning following Sir Montague was dead. Lady Leigh, to whom, on his return, her husband had related all which had occurred in the room of the dying Jew, thanked Heaven that he was gone, and then she implored his lordship that he would, as soon as possible, impart to Maude the glad news of her father's innocence.

The latter was so far recovered that she had in her mind already made arrangements for leaving the Park, but Dr. Bentley said she could do nothing of the kind for another fortnight at least; so she had to bend to a will more powerful than her own, and remain for awhile a prisoner in her room.

The next day a gentleman called on his lordship, and advancing to the library, to which room he had been shown, the latter started on coming face to face with the new Baronet.

It was now eighteen years since they had met, and whilst with Lord Leigh there was but little alteration, in the other it was the form and face of an old man, with deep lines beneath the eyes, and on the forehead, from which the white hair was pushed back.

"Doubtless you are surprised to see me!" he said; "and so changed," he added, after a pause, and then he stopped, waiting, apparently, for Lord Leigh to answer.

"You are changed, awfully changed, Sydney," the latter answered; "but sit down, and tell me, why, of all men, you should come to me!"

But without noticing the last sentence,—

"I was telegraphed for," he said, "but arrived too late—my father was dead. But that is not what brought me to you. I could not rest till I had seen you, for I have never known a day's peace since then!"

He paused, and there came over his face a terrible look of fear, and he shuddered, whilst he looked over his shoulder as if in dread of a sudden apparition; but both were silent, when Lord Leigh, raising his eyes till they rested on his craven face,—

"Would you make reparation for your crime if it laid in your power to do so now?" he asked.

"Yes," the other answered, "too gladly, even to death, but not the scaffold! Oh! Heaven, not that!" and again he trembled like a leaf.

"Your life is safe," Lord Leigh answered, unable to hide the contempt he felt, when, laying a sheet of paper before him, he commenced writing rapidly, only waiting to pour out a glass of sherry, which he bade him drink, and then for a time there was nothing heard in the room but the ticking of the marble clock, and the scratch, scratch of his lordship's pen, when at last, having completed his task, he threw it across the table to where the other sat. "Read it," he said, "and sign your name."

"To what purpose?" the former asked, fear again getting the better of him.

"To clear the memory of him who suffered for your crime," was the reply; "that his supposed guilt may not throw a shadow over a young and blameless life, the life of George Hansell's daughter."

The pen shook so in his trembling hand that the letters were scarcely legible, and Lord Leigh could see the perspiration like great beads rest on his forehead, when again the paper was returned, with the name of Sydney Israel written at the end; then, holding out his hand,—

"Good-bye," he said, "we meet for the last time. May Heaven forgive you as I do!"

A few moments later the door closed for ever on the friend of his youth, for whose sake he had made himself almost as guilty as he.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION.

THERE was a grand funeral when Sir Montague was laid to rest with his fathers, the daily papers indulging in eulogiums on the benevolence of the great man, whose will was afterwards proved under eight hundred thousand pounds.

The chief portion of this wealth came to the new Baronet, with the estate, but there were legacies to relatives and servants, and an annuity of one hundred pounds per annum to the old woman, Mrs. Gregson, who lived in the cottage at the end of the lover's walk, whilst five hundred pounds was left to her grandson Jim.

It created quite a sensation amongst the villagers. This strange bequest to a man who had done no more for the late Baronet than any other farm-labourer in the neighbourhood, though he was a nice young fellow, and the former had taken to him ever since, when a baby, his mother had been found murdered in the lover's walk.

Lady Leigh had heard of it all through her maid, who was surprised, as she told Mrs. Felton afterwards, that her ladyship made no remark, apparently thinking it nothing at all extraordinary; and thus, while different surmises and comments were passing in the servants' hall, Maudie was fast regaining health and strength, as she reclined on the sofa which had been drawn up for her by the fire in her little room upstairs.

"I have read it all, dear Lady Leigh," she said, when the door opening her ladyship entered. "May I burn it now?"

"Yes, dear," was the reply, as the gentle lady kissed her.

And then Maudie tossed into the flames the confession, in which Sydney Israel had lifted from her father's name the stigma which had rested on it.

"I was a wild young fellow then," it ran; "now twenty years ago, when I returned from college to be with my father. Close to where we lived was Leigh Park, the residence of Lord Leigh, who was then a young man about my own age."

"We soon became fast friends, never having had a difference until it came to his knowledge somehow that I was trifling with the affections of a girl in the neighbourhood, Mary Gregson, known as the belle of the village, when he remonstrated with me for what he called my heartless conduct, knowing full well that even had she been in my own station of life my father would never consent to my marrying a Christian; but telling him that Mary knew very well it was nothing more than a flirtation the matter rested, things going on much in the same way, until a year after, when I knew of the birth of a child—Mary's and mine."

"It was then that her mother urged her on to compel me to do her justice, or she would expose me to my father. I did not know which way to turn, not daring to tell Lord Leigh of the scrape I had got myself into."

"However, I told Mary to meet me in the lover's walk, which had been the trysting-place for sweethearts from generation to generation, until it obtained the name it still bears. It was sure."

"Mary was there at the appointed time, and when I told her it was impossible that I could make her my wife, from entreaties she turned to threats. She told me in place of the love she once had for me only hate remained. She would go to my father, and do me all the injury it was possible for her to do."

"My anger was roused; I caught her as she stood there in the moonlight, and my fingers fastened around her fair, round neck, until her eyes, starting from their sockets, I released her, to fall at my feet a sickening corpse."

"To flee from the scene of my fearful crime was my first thought, but as the moon emerged from a cloud which had temporarily obscured her light, her rays fell on a ring, which mockingly glittered beneath her beams, on the finger of the dead girl."

"It was my gift, on which my name was engraved, and hers. Her mother knew it well, so stopping down I tore it from her finger, and turned to find I was not alone—Lord Leigh had been a witness of my sin."

"That he would deliver me up to justice was my first thought, but when I appealed to him, telling him that I was innocent of the intention, though the deed was the same, I at last prevailed on him to let matters take their course, but on the understanding that I was to take my father

into my confidence, and immediately quit England.

"The girl's body, I knew, must be shortly discovered, but in this I was wrong, for the lane being so little frequented it was not found for over a week. However, feeling insecure whilst I carried about me the ring she was wearing at the time, I determined to dispose of it in such a way as to turn all suspicion from myself."

"A man named George Hansell, whom I knew from Mary herself to have been a former lover of hers, was stationed with his regiment at Windsor, and to see him before I left the country was my object. I lost no time in carrying out my intention, and I had little difficulty, under the pretext of carrying some message from Mary herself, in gaining an interview with the young soldier."

"He told me he had not been long married, to which I replied that Mary was soon to be married too, and had sent him a keepsake in memory of the past."

"He took it from my hand evidently pleased, never even asking my name, unconsciously of the tiny spring which opened to display a few threads of my hair and hers neatly woven together, and our names on the gold within, and then, saying he must give her something as a wedding-gift, after a short time we parted."

"A few hours later I saw the cliffs of Dover fade from my view, and although I studied the English papers, wherever I was that they were obtainable, I could learn nothing further than the discovery of the body, but no clue to the murderer."

"Thus two years passed. I felt myself secure, for I knew Lord Leigh would never betray me, besides hearing from my father that the latter had laid him under such obligations that to open his lips would to himself mean utter ruin."

"I was satisfied, and when, later on, I heard that he was travelling in the East for an indefinite period I felt doubly secure."

"It was then that George Hansell thought to visit the mother of his old love—being near the village—to console her as far as he could, knowing, as all did, of the tragic end of the latter, when the ring he supposed to have been sent to him by the dead girl attracted the attention of the old woman as it glittered on his finger."

"George was arrested, tried, and convicted. Lord Leigh away, ignorant until too late that an innocent man had suffered for my crime."

"SYDNEY ISRAEL."

Thus the confession ended.

But although the name she bore had no taint of crime, still Maudie felt she could not become the wife of Bertie.

"The daughter of a non-com. is not a fit match for the nephew of Lord Leigh," she urged, when a short time after Captain Beyzone had drawn her sunny head down to his broad shoulder, but the latter would hear of nothing but that she would be his own sweet bride; his aunt and uncle would welcome her into their circle, and to him she was all the world beside.

And so, a few months later, when Maudie once more returned to Leigh Park (for she had left it for awhile to spend a short time with Mrs. Bertrone), it was as the affianced wife of Bertie.

But the children could not believe but that her illness was due to seeing the ghost in the haunted lane.

Many years have passed since then. Bertie and Florrie, themselves now beautiful women, two other little ones bear the same name, are often to be seen at the Park now, when Captain and Mrs. Beyzone are on a visit there.

The mansion of the former Sir Montague Israel has passed to another branch of the family; his son, the late Baronet having died abroad some years since, bequeathing all his personal property to George Hansell's daughter.

[THE END]

BARBARA MORELAND'S CHOICE.

—21—

"I HOPE, Miss Barbara, you realise fully what you are throwing away. It would be a pity if you were to come to your senses too late," and John Hammond rose from his chair and walked nervously up and down the room.

He was a man of about fifty, of medium height, and good figure. Judging from the resolute cast of countenance, a thoughtful observer would say that he was a man to succeed in almost any undertaking by the power of his will, but that he would very likely miss the best kind of happiness that life affords, through lacking the gentler qualities of mind and heart. However correct such a judgment might be, it is very certain that the world looked upon John Hammond as an eminently successful man.

Never, perhaps, in his whole life had he felt so sure of success, as the day he went to ask Barbara Moreland to be his wife. By his own library fire he had deliberated long on the subject. It had been no hasty matter with him—that was not his way. He weighed carefully the pros and cons, and decided that, in view of all the circumstances, the result could not be otherwise than the one he wished.

The circumstances, briefly stated, were these: Barbara's father had died insolvent a year before, and Mr. Hammond held the mortgage on his fine house and elegant furniture. He had been Mr. Moreland's trusted friend for years, and had helped him out of financial straits over and over again. But it was all of no use; affairs became so hopelessly entangled that at last the poor man's brain yielded under the strain, and he gave up the struggle.

John Hammond had been a frequent visitor at the house, and had watched the eldest daughter with silent admiration for some time.

Mabel, three years younger, was considered the prettier of the two; but Barbara's attractiveness lay deeper than outward beauty.

There was enough fine feeling in Mr. Hammond's composition for him to realise that with Barbara's somewhat independent nature and romantic tendencies, the very fact that he held the family in his power might work against him. But whatever doubts came up in his mind were quickly dispelled by an interview with Mrs. Moreland, who received his proposal for her daughter's hand with unfeigned gratification and relief, adding to her own consent the assurance that she knew it would also have been her husband's wish.

To be sure, she said to herself, after he had gone—she was twenty-five years older than Barbara, and a widow, and girls sometimes had notions about "first love," and all that; but Barbara was really sensible, and would see, of course, what a splendid thing it would be for them all for her to marry him.

It was not strange, therefore, that the practical, well-meaning, self-confident man was taken completely aback when the slender girl before him quietly but firmly declined the honour of becoming his wife. For a moment the world seemed to stand still. He could scarcely believe that he had understood her words aright.

"But, Miss Barbara," he pleaded, "you cannot have considered the matter in all its bearings—your home—your mother and sister—"

"Oh, hush, please," she said, hastily, with an imploring gesture. "Indeed, I have thought of everything, and I cannot do any differently," and the brave brown eyes looked straight into his, with an earnest entreaty for him to spare her. She knew only too well the points of the situation.

But John Hammond was not to be alienated very easily. He drew his chair nearer to hers and leaned forward, fixing his keen eyes on her. Never before had she looked so sweet and lovely to him, as she sat there trembling a little, yet struggling proudly with herself to appear composed. His mood softened, and he began another train of argument.

"Barbara, I do not want you to think about the business arrangement. Of course, that is a

secondary consideration. I want you to think only of the love and protection I can give you. You must have known that I have long admired you, and now I only ask that—"

"I am so sorry, Mr. Hammond, but I cannot let you go on. It is all useless, and will only give you pain. I feel very grateful for your kindness to us, and shall always esteem you as my dear father's friend, and mine also, if you will let me; but any other relationship between us is utterly impossible."

She rose, walked to the low mantel, and rearranged some of the ornaments.

"But why should it be utterly impossible?" he asked, following her with his eyes. "I should like to know your objections."

Her pale face flushed. Then, with an effort, she replied,—

"It is because I do not love you; and I never can marry anyone whom I do not love with my whole heart."

"Ah, I see—you believe in a 'grande passion.'" And all traces of his softer mood vanished. He straightened himself in his chair. "Come, Barbara, those ideas will do very well for sentimental schoolgirls; but, for a sensible woman like yourself, they are absurd. Just look at the whole situation, the bare facts of the case. We all have to face realities sooner or later in this world; and the earlier we learn to accept them, the better for us. Think what I can do for you and your family before you foolishly put the possibility out of your reach. Your mother has given her consent, and, from certain hints your father dropped in his last sad days, I feel sure he would have approved also."

"Do you think it is kind to bring up these things?" cried Barbara, drawing her slight figure to its full height, and turning on him with burning indignant eyes. "My father never, never would have wished me to marry against my will, whatever depended upon it! And, as for my mother and Mabel, I am ready to make any sacrifice for them but this, which is impossible. They have no right to ask it. Oh, Mr. Hammond, can't you understand? We must be true to ourselves, as well as to others. There are sins against the conscience which everyone can understand; but there are sins against the heart also. No, no; you may call it romantic and sentimental, or whatever you please, but these are the 'facts of the situation' to me; and I dare not go against what I feel in my inmost soul to be true and right!"

John Hammond was touched, although he could not appreciate her feelings as a finer nature would have done; they seemed decidedly overstrained. However they had the effect of making him realize that it would be useless to urge his suit any longer. He felt disappointed, baffled, and his life was not accustomed to such experiences.

After a few moments of sullen silence, he rose, saying coldly,—

"I hope, Miss Barbara, you realize fully what you are throwing away. It would be a pity if you were to come to your senses too late."

"I shall never regret anything, Mr. Hammond, but the pain I have caused you," Barbara answered, in a low voice.

He walked back and forth a few times, nervously gnawing his grey moustache. Finally, he paused in front of her.

"I will come again, after you have had a chance to talk it over with your mother—after you have had time to consider my offer calmly in all its important aspects, as regards the other members of your family as well as yourself. I shall come one week from to-day, for my final answer."

"I can never make it any different from the one I have given you to-day—" Barbara began to say; but before she had finished her sentence, he had bowed politely and left the house.

The week that followed was a hard one for the poor girl. Sometimes it seemed as if her strength must give way before the overwhelming torrents of tears, reproaches, arguments, and selfish supplications poured forth by her mother and sister.

"Oh, mother, mother!" she said, one night,

"you cannot know what you ask of me, or you would not—" And then she broke down utterly.

"My child," and Mrs. Moreland's voice was very calm and meant to be convincing. "I only ask of you what is for your good. It is the most natural and the most sensible thing, anyone would say who knew all the circumstances. Mr. Hammond will make a very kind and indulgent husband, and you would be far happier as his wife than you will struggling to earn your own living in some narrow, pinched way. You have been brought up in luxury, and haven't the faintest idea what it means to be actually poor."

"I wish I had been the one," said pretty, worldly Mabel. "He would have met with better success if he had tried for me."

They were sitting by the library fire, after dinner. There seemed to be in these days only one topic of conversation.

"I have thought, sometimes," Mrs. Moreland continued,—"that possibly you may have imagined yourself in love with Stuart Turner, your penniless young artist friend. But I cannot believe you would let such a foolish fancy weigh against a substantial offer like Mr. Hammond's."

Barbara started as if she had received an electric shock—and then her heart stood still. She sat gazing into the fire, stunned and motionless. By-and-by, among the burning coals, definite pictures took shape.

She saw herself dancing with Stuart Turner, at one of Mrs. Danforth's elegant balls. After the dance they walked through the brilliant rooms, and then went into the conservatory to rest and talk. There, among the flowers, he told her he was going to Italy, to lead a Bohemian artist's life for the next few years, study the old masters, and see if he could not paint something worth while. He took both her little hands in his as he said, looking straight into her eyes,—

"Will you promise not to forget me, Barbara—though I should not see you again for years?"

And she, with her eyes held captive by his, had answered in a voice wholly new to herself, yet scarcely above a whisper,—

"I promise never to forget you, Stuart."

That was all. And it was two years ago that it happened. She had not received one word from him during that time—but she had not forgotten. Her mother surely did a very unwise thing for her own side of the case, to call forth those vivid pictures in the fire glow. She got up presently, saying she was too tired to talk any more, and went upstairs to her room.

A new idea had seized her. Other memories had followed close. Her happy summer at Scarborough, after that winter, all came back to her, and on her way upstairs these words kept ringing in her ears:

"If the day should ever come when you stand in need of a friend, my child, I hope you won't forget old Kingsley Jacobs."

To this friend she decided to turn in her trouble. For the first time in weeks she slept soundly.

The next morning she quietly told her mother that she was going to see Mr. Jacobs. That she meant to try and get pupils there; something to do by which she could support herself.

She urged her mother to accept their Uncle John's generous offer of a home, which he had extended to them when first he knew the shape his brother-in-law had left his affairs. If only her mother and Mabel would go to him till she found out what she could do; then, perhaps, in a year or two, they might make a home together somewhere.

Mrs. Moreland was struck dumb with amazement at her daughter's plans.

"Barbara, you are crazy!" she shrieked, when she found her voice, and would not listen to anything she proposed.

Poor Barbara did what packing was necessary, left a short, decisive note for Mr. Hammond, who was to come the next day for his final answer, and departed with a sad but brave heart.

To old Mr. Jacobs her coming was like a ray of sunshine let in on his gloomy life.

He lived alone in a large mansion, cared for

by a faithful old housekeeper and devoted servants.

He had no near relatives left, and he opened his heart and his doors to the brave, beautiful girl who would not make a mercenary marriage.

It gratified him beyond measure that she had chosen, out of all the world, to turn to him. If she must try her wings a little, he would aid her plan; but secretly he determined not to part with her for any length of time. So, to please her, he found her a home with two elderly ladies who kept a small boarding-house in a pleasant street.

Before long she obtained a few music-pupils, and also a position as organist at a little church close by, where she had taken a Sunday-school class.

It had never been able to pay for music before, but she was waited on by a committee, who stated that a fund had been raised, and they would like to engage her services at a salary of fifty pounds a year. They did not tell her that the sole contributor to the fund was Mr. Kingsley Jacobs—and Barbara never knew.

Every day she spent an hour or two with her kind benefactor, reading to him, and trying in various ways to make his life brighter and less lonely.

She wrote a long, joyful letter home after she was fairly into her work, but it was six weeks before she received a reply. One came at last—a brief, cold note informing her of Mabel's approaching marriage to Mr. Hammond.

A year passed quickly, full of usefulness and happy content for Barbara. But Mr. Jacobs was growing feeble, and he depended more and more on this bright young life which had become closely entwined with his. He could do without her no longer. She must come and comfort his few remaining years. So Barbara gave up her teaching and went to live at the great old house, and became a loving, devoted daughter to the old man who had never been blessed with wife or child.

Two years more elapsed, when, one day a tall young man, with blonde hair and moustache and a head set proudly on his square shoulders, strode up to Mr. Jacobs's door and asked for Miss Moreland. He was shown into the parlour, and then a very strange thing happened: Barbara came running downstairs, with shining eyes and trembling lips, hesitated an instant on the threshold, then rushed straight into the outstretched arms of the visitor, whose face and eyes were eloquent with love's longing.

Stuart Turner had great difficulty in reconciling Mr. Jacobs to his wishes. Barbara had become so dear to the invalid, he could scarcely bear to have her out of his sight. And did this young jacksnape expect he was going to give her up for the asking? Why didn't he come for her before? Why did he stay over there dabbling pictures, when the poor child was turned out of her home? And so he went on. But gradually his wrath subsided and he could listen to the lover's story. After a long talk, they came to an understanding, and matters were arranged in this wise:

The young artist was to marry Kingsley Jacobs's adopted daughter and heiress. He was to open a studio, but the pair were to live at the great house; and Barbara was never to be separated from the kind old man, the light of whose life she had become.

"I should hardly have dared to come, darling, if I had known you were an heiress," said Stuart, when everything was happily settled and he and Barbara were talking over together all that they had lived in the years that had passed since the night they parted, and she promised not to forget him.

"You know, it was your wealth and position that kept me back in the first place. I couldn't face your father and ask for you, in my poverty; so I had to go without a word. But I determined, as soon as I could scrape together five thousand pounds, to come straight away home. And now here you are, richer than ever. I suppose, really, I ought to have gone right back to Italy as soon as I heard of it." And he smiled down into her eyes.

"Oh, Stuart! and you would have left me to mourn for you all my days!"

The only answer she received was a shower of kisses upon her upturned face.

[THE END.]

MY SWEETHEART.

CHAPTER VIII.

To portray the wild grief of Paula when she opened her eyes and found the doctor's wife bending over her and discovered where she was, would be impossible.

She caught at the woman's hands and held them, imploring her on her knees to open the door and set her free, for she had a mother and sister at home whose hearts were breaking over her protracted absence. But the woman was deaf to her pleading.

"Dear me, dear me! They all tell the same tale," she muttered, fretfully; "and this one is worse than the rest—crazy as a loon."

"You surely do not—you cannot think that I am mad!" cried Paula, looking at her aghast, and with horror-stricken, dilated blue eyes.

"Oh, no, there is none of them insane," replied the woman, in a cajoling tone that was aggravating in the extreme—"at least, that's what they all say, and the first thing we know they are mad as hornets, and we have to put the strait-jacket on 'em."

Paula gazed at her with a wildly-beating heart.

"I know you have a kind heart, madam," she said, piteously, "and because of it, see, I am kneeling at your feet, praying you to grant me just one request, and that is to send for my sister Mildred. All my trouble has been brought about by consenting to take a row on the water—to go for a half-day's pleasuring without consulting my poor mother. I—I was so thoughtless! I never—never dreamed that harm would come of it."

"Come, come," said the woman, brusquely; "get up from your knees. Don't get dramatic; it won't do you any good. I'll see about sending for your sister to-morrow; it's too late to-night."

"Oh, no, no, it is not too late!" sobbed Paula. "Think—oh, think and picture if you can the agony my poor mother and sister will endure from being in doubt as to where I am! Mildred will have all the police looking for me."

"They might as well look for a needle in a haystack," retorted the woman, with a harsh laugh. "They would never think of finding you here."

"But you have promised to send for Mildred," retorted Paula, tearfully, "and those words have comforted me."

She meant to say more—much more—but the woman gave her no opportunity, for she suddenly quitted the room, and Paula heard the dull grating of a key in the lock, and she realized that she was a prisoner within those four walls. And then she gave vent to her terrible woe in the bitterest of sobs and heartrending cries.

All in vain she tore at the lock with her white fingers. The great oaken door was firm. Ere daylight dawned she had worked herself into a high fever, and thus Dudley found her when he called the next day.

"We shall have no trouble with her for a fortnight at least," said Doctor Ravelli. "It will be fully that length of time ere she is conscious of where she is and what is transpiring around her. Perhaps it will be double that time."

Dudley regretted the shape affairs had taken, but made the best of it.

"She will remain here quietly enough until the fuss about her disappearance has entirely blown over," he told himself triumphantly.

It was a month ere Paula awoke to consciousness of what was transpiring about her. She opened her eyes and gazed around her for a moment, quite dazed. She found herself in a very large room, and on a very narrow, low, white bed. Similar couches were placed at

regular intervals all along the apartment, and here and there were groups of women, with some solitary figures at the long, narrow, barred windows.

As she gazed, the blood in her veins seemed to stand still. The appearance of these women in the loose, sombre garb, with their pale, vacant faces and staring eyes, told her the horrible truth; she was surrounded by the insane patients in the private asylum to which Pierce Dudley had brought her!

Her tongue cleaved to the roof of her mouth, and every hair on her head seemed to stand on end, as she saw that she had attracted their attention by sitting up in her bed. One by one they advanced slowly toward the couch, gazing at her, and gibbering as though the place were a pandemonium. A wild cry broke from Paula's death-white lips.

"Oh, merciful Heaven! save me from them!" she gasped, gazing at them in horror, and cowering back among the pillows. Her terror was so intense at that moment that she thought she was going mad herself.

"Hush!" whispered a voice close beside her. "You have nothing to fear, my poor girl. These poor creatures will not harm you. Do not be afraid."

Paula saw a tall, sad-faced girl standing beside her, looking down upon her with a reassuring smile.

"Are you one of the nurses?" cried Paula, grasping at her skirts and clinging to her in terror.

The sad, pale face into which she gazed in such fright flushed redly.

"No," she answered. "I am supposed to be one of the patients; but I am no more mad than yourself. I was inveigled into this place by one of the cruelest of frauds, and I have been in this living tomb for over fifteen years. I tell you this—I open my heart to you at once—for I can see that you are not mad, though they have placed you here."

"I am not, indeed," sobbed Paula. "I, too, am here through a fraud so cruel the wonder is that Heaven ever let it be accomplished."

"For many a week after I found myself behind these bolts and bars I wept and prayed, and paced the floor, beseeching them to set me free, only to be laughed and jeered at. But as time dragged its slow length by, I became accustomed to the life. I no longer tore at the locks and gratings. I taught myself, by almost superhuman perseverance, to be resigned to my fate, since escape is impossible for me now."

"And will that fate be mine, do you think?" cried Paula, with a bitter cry. "Why, one week among these creatures would drive me mad—say, as mad as they."

"So you think now, but you would in time cease to fear these harmless creatures. They are not half so formidable as they look."

"I must have some one to open my heart to, and tell my story to, or I shall die," sobbed Paula, and clasping the hands of her new-found friend, she told her, piteously, the whole story, and declared that her mother and Mildred had surely walked the floor the whole night through, watching and waiting for her, beside themselves with terror and anxiety over her absence.

"Oh, if I had but consulted mother yesterday," she cried, wringing her white hands, "this fate would never have befallen me!"

"Poor child!" murmured Paula's companion. "I am sorry to tell you that it was not yesterday that it happened, but many a yesterday ago. You have been lying ill here for four weeks, and I have been watching over you. There was a time when we thought you would not live through it."

Paula's poignant grief when she learned this can better be imagined than described.

"Do not take it to heart so, my poor child," said her companion, stroking the golden curls back from the girl's lovely pale face. "That will not mend matters."

But Paula was not to be comforted.

"Oh, if my mother and sister only knew where I am!" she sobbed. "I must get out of this place; oh, I must find some means of escape!"

"They would keep you here for long years if

they could—so long, in fact, as the one who put you here will pay for your being kept here," she whispered. "But there is a way of escape. I will tell you about it when you are able to undertake it."

"I wonder that you did not avail yourself of it," returned Paula, anxiously, "if it could be accomplished. I would be only too willing to do so."

The woman's eyes filled with a sudden rush of tears.

"It would be useless, worse than useless, for my days on earth are numbered. Death may claim me any hour now—any moment. I am subject to hemorrhage of the lungs. Two I have already had. As is well known, the third will prove fatal. The least excitement will bring it about. I have thought it all over, and weighed my chances. I could make my way out only to fall down dead in the street. I am too weak to carry out the project; but you shall profit by my knowledge just as soon as you are able to go."

"We will go together," whispered Paula, eagerly; but her companion shook her head.

"I would be a stumbling-block in your path, and endanger your success," she said, sadly.

"But why shouldn't you crave liberty and life?" cried Paula. "You are still young!"

"I will tell you why," replied the woman, with a dry sob in her voice. "I pray Heaven night and day for death, for life holds no charm for me. I will tell you my simple story in a few words; I had a lover whom I loved as few women love. I was an heiress, and he was a struggling young merchant. But what cared I for that! I was alone in the world but for my half-brother. I craved some one to love me."

"On the evening that I was to have been wed, my half-brother abducted me and brought me here, and here I have been in close confinement for long years, and here came the brother who had cursed my poor life, taunting me with the story which he boldly admitted to have circulated himself—that I had eloped with another."

"The shock killed my lover—he took his poor life on the spot. I read it in the paper which they brought to taunt me with, and from that moment, oh, how I have prayed to die and join him! We were torn from each other's arms on earth, but up there I shall find him, and we will be heart to heart at last. I do not want to go back to the world since he has left it. No, no; I will stay here in my living tomb until the end comes."

"My cruel enemy may enjoy his ill-gotten wealth. It is all dross to me now. It could not bring back my lover or purchase one caress from his pale, cold lips."

CHAPTER IX.

"Will you tell me your name?" asked Paula, her eyes suffused with plying tears as she gazed into the face so marked by suffering that looked into her own.

Her companion shook her head.

"All who knew me have passed away," she said, "and strangers would pay no heed to my tale of woe. Go and forget me, sweet girl, and if memory ever reverts to me, know that the happiest moments I have known in many a year were caused by the thought that through my aid you will be free. Once in passing through this room the woman in attendance dropped a key from the ring which she carried. It fell on a rug, making no sound. I picked it up and hid it, and—Hush-sh! I will tell you at another time; some one is coming."

The door opened, and Doctor Ravelli entered with his wife, both going straight to Paula's couch.

"Ah!" he said, as he encountered the gaze of her terrified, blue eyes, "conscious at last, are you, my dear! I thought that last powerful medicine we gave you would bring you to your senses. Help her to dress at once, my dear," he said, turning to his wife. "Mr. Dudley is waiting with the utmost impatience to see her."

"I will not see him!" cried Paula, with flashing eyes. "I would die first!"

"Oh, yes, you will see him," responded the doctor, harshly. "Either consent to come out into the reception-room or he shall be brought in here."

An entreating glance from the earnest eyes of her new-found friend warned her that discretion would be the better part of valour.

He smiled when he saw that his threat had apparently brought the wilful, defiant little beauty into subjection.

Very soon after she entered the reception-room, where Pierce Dudley was pacing impatiently up and down. He stopped short when she crossed the threshold.

"My beautiful little Paula!" he cried, advancing towards her with admiring eyes and outstretched hands. "You have lost your red cheeks, but, by Jove! you are prettier than ever—just like a sweet, little white rosebud!"

"Stand back!" cried the girl, her lips fairly quivering and her blue eyes dilating with scintillating sparks of flame. "Don't dare to come a step nearer me or attempt to touch me."

Dudley looked at her standing there so lovely even in her rage, and a sudden love that startled even himself woke suddenly into life in his heart for her.

He had come to tell her that he was bound for America, and was there to say good-bye; but now a sudden desire stronger than his own soul possessed him to take her with him. He determined to marry her and take her with him by fair means or foul.

"Paula," he said, hoarsely, standing before her with folded arms, "do not sneer at me and treat me so coldly until you hear what I have to say. I have been longing to tell you the moment you were well enough to see me. It is this, my pretty sweetheart Paula; I am sorry—so sorry for the past and for the disgrace I have brought upon your innocent head, and would undo what I have caused you to undergo at the cost of my life, if it were the price. Let me make what reparation there is in my power to make. Marry me, sweet Paula, and let my name and my love shield you for evermore from the world's cold scorn, for I do love you, Paula—I love you with a love that is almost superhuman—with a love that has made me your slave, body and soul—I love you with a love such as I have never felt for any young girl before. You can make me either an angel or a fiend incarnate. I am sorry that I took you rowing that unfortunate afternoon—sorry still that you have lain here ill unto death for long weeks. Let me restore your fair name by making you my bride. We will leave here and go to a land of sunshine and love. I—"

Paula cut him short by a stamp of her little foot, and a bitter laugh that sounded hard on such sweet young lips.

"I would die before I would marry you, Pierce Dudley," she panted. "You insult me by asking me to wed you."

"There are worse insults one can offer than asking a young girl to be his wife," he said, flushing angrily and frowning darkly. "Have a care, Paula, there is such a thing as scorn turning the strongest, the mightiest love to hate."

"I would sooner have your hatred than your love," she returned; "I add, in all truth, I abhor you so."

"Do you love anyone else?" he cried, fiercely grasping her slender wrist and holding it in such a manner that she winced with pain.

"I refuse to answer you—you have no right to ask me," she retorted.

"You do love someone else, Paula Garstin," he blazed, "and that someone else is Gregor Thorpe, my cousin. He! the very mention of his name brings the colour in a flood to your face. But know this, girl, and I glory in telling it to you; on the morrow Thorpe and I meet in a duel, and it is on your account. He has been searching the whole city to find you—he has slept neither night nor day, the fool!—and he accuses me of spiriting you away, having found out that you were last seen with me, and that I took you out for a row. He has tried to drag the truth from me as to what has become of you, but he might as well attempt to make the Sphinx speak as to draw one word from me. Know this,

Paula Garstin, you are parted from him as completely as though you lay in your grave. I shall come here to-morrow morning," he concluded, "bringing someone with me to marry us, and I warn you to hold yourself in readiness, for the ceremony must go on, whether you will or not."

"I shall cry out against it, and appeal to the minister to save me, he would not wed an unwilling bride," declared the girl.

Dudley laughed harshly.

"I shall not bring a person, but a registrar whom I know could be bought body and soul for a fifty-pound note, and I warn you to save your breath; he will turn a deaf ear to your entreaties as he will be paid for doing. Go with me to America to-morrow you shall! You see, I make full arrangements to go, being fully aware that I shall come out of to-morrow's duel right side up. An revoir until to-morrow morning, my sweetheart Paula. Be so good as to expect me then."

Dudley kissed his hand to her in the most graceful fashion, and with one of his faultless bows he left her—left her standing there leaning against the mantel white as death, and with a heart twice as cold.

She could scarcely make her way back to her apartment, her agitation was so great.

Her new-found friend hastened to meet her, her appearance was so death-like, and, in a voice quivering with suppressed sobs, Paula told her the whole story.

"That will facilitate matters, my poor child," returned her companion, sympathisingly. "You must make your escape to-night, as soon as it is dusk."

Slowly the long hours of the day dragged themselves by, and the long-looked-for dusk came at last, and Paula stood with the key in her hand that was to unlock the door to freedom.

"After leaving this room," explained her friend, "you will find a door to the right—the room in which the patients' clothes are kept—that is, the clothes they wore when they entered this place. Do not take your own hat and wrap, but secure the first that comes to hand."

With many tears and a fervent "Heaven bless you!" they parted.

The great iron door opened softly on its hinges, Paula passed through, and closed it again with an ominous click.

Paula secured a long, dark cloak, a bonnet and dark veil, which she quickly donned, despite her great agitation, and summoning all her courage to her command, stepped out into the corridor.

"Heaven grant that I might meet no one!" was her fervent prayer; but that was not to be. Just as she passed the library, the door suddenly opened, and Doctor Revell himself appeared on the threshold.

"Is that you, Mary?" he asked, sharply, looking keenly at the veiled little figure.

Paula remembered that that was the name of the servant girl who waited on the patients.

"Yes," she answered; and she was startled at the sound of her own voice, it sounded so hollow.

"Who gave you permission to go?" he asked, brusquely.

"The lady," she stammered, shrinking back into the dense shadow.

"I gave express orders that you were not to be allowed your afternoon or evening out this week, for I have work for you to do to-night."

"Yes, sir," murmured Paula, in the same voice, that was so death-like in its quivering tone.

"One of our new patients has to be got ready to take a sudden journey—she goes to America to-morrow. She—she is a very violent patient, and may cause us considerable trouble; but I will soon quiet all that. Madame knew about this. I am surprised that she allowed you to go out."

Paula's heart beat so loudly, and with such terrific force, she was sure he must hear it.

"If—I could but go to the chemist's sir," she faltered. "I would be back almost immediately."

His brow darkened.

"How long will it take you to do your purchasing and return?" he asked, sharply.

"Not more than ten minutes, sir," she re-

plied; and she could not help the eager tremulousness of her voice.

"I will see," he said. "Step into the drawing-room, and I will bring madame here."

Paula almost fell dead at his feet when she heard that.

"Ah, here comes my wife now," he said. "If she can spare you for that length of time it will be a surprise to me, knowing how busy we are this evening."

CHAPTER X.

FOR one instant of time it seemed to Paula Garstin that she would fall dead at Doctor Revell's feet. Her heart seemed to stop beating, so great was her terror, and her breath came in short gasps.

The doctor, thinking she had misunderstood him, repeated his words:

"Step into the library—madame is coming this way; I hear her voice—and we will soon ascertain whether you can go on your errand or not."

Paula's lips grew white with fear. She realised if she were to step into the lighted library he would discover that she was not Mary, the maid, and the moment her own identity was revealed all hope of escape from the living tomb in which her enemy had thrust her would be at an end.

All of her future depended upon what the next moment would bring forth. Should she make some excuse to avoid entering the library, or make a bold dash for the main door, which was scarcely six feet distant?

Her brain reeled and her thoughts became confused. It was by the greatest effort she could withstand the deathly faintness that seemed stealing over her, locking her senses as in a vice.

Fate stepped in to her rescue. At that moment there was a resounding peal at the bell.

"Answer the summons, Mary," said the doctor, quickly. "And if it is a person who gives the name of Mr. Powers, allow him to pass in. He has business with me. He is the same man who was here yesterday."

The girl needed no second bidding. In a trice she had reached the door and flung it wide open. A tall, dark man stood in the vestibule.

"Kindly tell the doctor that Mr. Powers would like to see him," said the stranger.

"Please step in. The doctor is expecting you. He is in the library."

The man stepped past her, and as he did so, Paula slipped out, closing the door quickly after her. She knew the doctor would not miss her just then; he would be so busy greeting the new-comer.

With the swiftness of a startled fawn fleeing from its pursuers, Paula sped down the street. The clock in an adjoining steeples struck ten just as she reached her own door.

Looking up, she saw a light in her mother's room, and great blinding tears came to her pretty blue eyes at the welcome sight.

Panting with excitement, Paula gained the top floor. The door of her mother's room stood ajar, and, with a little glad, sobbing cry, the girl sprang toward it and flung it open wide, with the word "Mother!" on her lips.

But the sight that met her view rooted her to the threshold, turned the blood to ice in her veins, and hushed the glad cry on her lips. Not one familiar object met her gaze, and in the centre of the apartment a strange woman sat rocking a little child to sleep.

"I—I must have made a great mistake. I—I am quite bewildered," faltered Paula. "I was looking for Mrs. Garstin's rooms."

"These were Mrs. Garstin's rooms; they are mine now," returned the woman.

"How—how—long since she—moved?" gasped Paula. "And can you tell me—where—she went?"

The woman looked at her.

"Oh! don't you know?" she queried; and before Paula could find her voice to reply, she went on: "The poor old lady is dead. Did you not know that?" she repeated. "But, of course, you haven't heard, or you wouldn't be asking."

"No, I had not heard," faltered Paula, in a voice scarcely human in its terrible pain.



"WHAT IS THE MATTER, MY GOOD GIRL?" SAID A TALL WOMAN STANDING BESIDE HER.

"Come in and sit down, and I will tell you about it," said the woman. "No doubt you've travelled far; you look tired and weak-like;" and she gazed curiously at the white, pitiful face turned towards her.

Paula sank into the nearest seat.

"It's a sad story," said the woman. "The doctors and the world say she died of apoplexy; I say she died of a broken heart, and it was the pretty will-o'-the-wisp daughter who ran away who will have to answer for it. There were all sorts of stories afloat," continued the woman; "but they couldn't hurt the poor dead mother, or reach her ears closed in death. But the other sister took it dreadfully hard. She lay at the point of death for a fortnight or more. She was out of her mind the day that her poor mother was carried away. And that was not the worst of it. When the poor girl got up from her bed they turned her into the street because she could not pay her rent, and they took her off to the poor-house, I hear. Are you crying, miss?" asked the woman. "Ah, no wonder! It is a pitiful story; it would bring tears to eyes of stone!"

Paula was rocking herself to and fro in a very tempest of emotion she could no longer suppress or control. She rose suddenly to her feet and staggered blindly toward the door.

"You are not rested yet, miss," said the woman, looking pityingly at the white, haggard face.

"I must go," faltered Paula; and, dazed with horrible pain, she staggered from the room, down the stairway, and out into the street again.

"Mother dead and Mildred in the poor-house," she wailed—"and I am to blame for it all!"

And, sinking down on her knees on the cold pavement, she wept tears that it must have grieved the angels to witness.

She wished to Heaven she had died out in the cold, dark water when night had overtaken her in that little boat.

"Was ever a young girl encompassed by such a fate before?" she wondered, sobbing bitterly.

Suddenly she heard the sound of a voice close beside her, saying—

"What is the matter, my good girl?"

Paula sprang to her feet and found a tall, gaunt woman standing beside her. She was well dressed and had a kindly face furrowed with deep lines of care.

The girl never knew how it happened, but she found herself briefly telling the whole bitter story to her sympathetic listener.

"It is a Godsend to both of us that we have met!" declared the woman. "Come home with me, my dear, and I will soon convince you of that. Mine is but an humble roof, but you are welcome to its hospitality;" and, little dreaming how strangely that one action would change the whole current of her after-life, Paula went with her.

"My name is Kate Hammond," she explained, as they walked along. "I live with my husband in a little cottage close by. He is a cripple and ill. I was after medicine for him; that is what brought me out so late."

The cottage was soon reached—a neat, home-like place, so cheery within that tears sprang to Paula's eyes in gratitude to Heaven for having met Kate Hammond.

"I will provide you a nice bed to-night," said Kate, "and to-morrow I would like to have a long talk with you upon a matter of vital importance to perhaps both of us. I—I—am sure it was fate that caused our paths to meet."

Despite the home-like comforts in the neat, pretty little room to which Mrs. Hammond conducted her, after providing her with a cup of tea, Paula could not rest or sleep, her grief was so intense over the death of her mother and poor Mildred's misfortune; and when Mrs. Hammond greeted her the next morning, she found her looking wretchedly pale and her eyes all tear-swollen, and she did her best to comfort her.

"You have been very good to me," said Paula, pressing the toil-hardened hands that clasped her

own, "and I shall never forget your kindness. I cannot trespass longer upon your hospitality. I must go and find something to do. I am sure they would not take me back into the business again, even if I wanted to go back, because Mr. Pierce Dudley, my enemy, is there, and for that reason I would die sooner than return. He must never know where I am. I will get a place somewhere, and then I will find Mildred."

"I will unfold a plan to you that may cause you to change your ideas," said Mrs. Hammond, earnestly; "but first, before I utter a word, I want you to take a solemn oath that you will never reveal one word that I say to you."

"Will not giving you my sacred promise be sufficient?" asked Paula.

"No," responded Mrs. Hammond. "You must take the most solemn of oaths not to betray me."

"Let it be as you wish," returned Paula. "I promise that the world shall never know one word of the story that you disclose to me."

"Even though you were lying on your death-bed?" said Mrs. Hammond, hoarsely.

"Even on my death-bed I promise not to reveal it."

"Swear it!" breathed the woman, her breath coming quick and hard.

"I swear it!" returned Paula.

For a moment the woman sat with her face buried in her hands.

"It is hard to unfold to a stranger a grievous sin that one has committed; but you are the only person in this world who can help me out of it," she went on in a low voice, quivering with emotion, and looking with strange eagerness into the girl's startled, wondering face. "Do not let my words frighten you," she said, sadly. "Do not condemn me before you have heard my story. Poverty drove me to do what I did. To the rich, such temptations never come. No wonder they can glide along life's ocean smoothly. They do not know where the shoals and the pitfalls lie."

(To be continued.)



BERRY IS A WITNESS OF COLONEL CHESTER'S INTERVIEW WITH THE MYSTERIOUS WOMAN.

BROWN AS A BERRY.

—102—

CHAPTER XXXII.

CAPTAIN CAREW is here. Berry has spoken to him, and even placed her hand in his without showing any sign of the emotion that she feels.

She looks him calmly in the eyes as she asks him in a softly and modulated voice, with just the right amount of courtesy and indifference, how he had fared since she saw him last.

She has been prepared for this, and has weighed well in her own mind how she will receive him.

But he is thunderstruck. Not having the clue to her conduct he cannot understand why she has so quickly changed. It is as though she had dealt him a blow when she smiles up at him in such evident unconcern.

There is not a trace left of the pretty embarrassment with which she bade him farewell, and the well-bred coolness that has taken its place finds no favour in his eyes.

If he ever thought her too impulsive, too lacking in *savoir faire*, he retracts that opinion now and repents of it in dust and ashes.

What would he not give to see again the muzzling blush and kindling eyes that were formerly aroused by his slightest word.

Nonsense had come upon him indeed, and he is too overwhelmed to ask himself whether it is also deserved.

It is late in the afternoon when he arrives, and when night comes he has had no chance of speaking to her alone. Nor even the next day is he more successful in his efforts. She avoids him persistently, but without apparent intention.

If, however, Berry proves cold and unenthusiastic, Lady Blanche is hospitality itself. She insists upon treating him as an invalid, and tempting his healthy appetite with all sorts of dainties, at all sorts of impossible hours.

"If I were really an invalid you would kill me!" he protests, laughing.

"Nonsense, Jack! you must be ill, whether you feel so or no, after grilling in the plains all this time!"

The compromise has not been effected after all, and she calls him the old name by which she knew him when a boy.

"Those pleasant days when we were children together! How light-hearted we were then, how free from care—and yet," slowly, "I would not have them back."

"You do not repent having elected to 'follow the drum!'"

"I? oh, no! How could I!" with a fond involuntary glance towards the room where two curly heads are pillowed, quietly asleep.

John Carew, remembering her stern old father, the earl, and the shifts to which they were often put to make the alien's pomp and poverty agree, is not surprised that she is happier now.

Besides, she married for love, and he is in that state of adoration bordering on imbecility when a man thinks matrimony the paradise it was meant to be at first.

"You are a very happy woman, Blanche!" he says, using something like the words Berry had used the day after she arrived.

"Of course I am! Did you doubt it? Or is happiness an uncommon thing that you should both comment upon mine?"

"Was Miss Cardell struck by your felicity, too?" he queries, lightly; but waiting eagerly for the reply he is hoping Berry will give herself.

She is so silent, and the very sound of her voice is sweet in his ears, however coldly she may speak.

They are on the verandah. He is leaning back in a long cane chair, while the two ladies are in smaller, but not less luxurious seats. Berry is farthest away from him, and has not glanced once in his direction since they have been out. She is listening to their conversation with a queer mixture of jealousy and impatience, but does

not betray anything of either. Her hands are clasped in her lap, her lips tightly compressed. It is Lady Blanche who answers now.

"Berry said the same as you. I am afraid you think me a very disreputable grass-widow to be so content away from my husband."

"He is coming up soon!" asks Captain Carew, absently.

"Yes, he is coming up soon!" nodding brightly. "And now I must have a peep at the bairnies. They ask me every morning if I have been in."

She gathers up her gown and goes into the house, leaving her guests together.

It is a lovely night, nearly as bright as day. A canopy of golden stars is spread above, and the new moon, caught in a tangle of her own silvery rays, seems loth to be released. The trees even lose a little of their sombre gloom, being faintly touched with the light. The air is cool though breathless, and soft with languorous scents. Only beyond the darker mountains the snow hills raise themselves like pale grey ghosts from a mist of white encircling clouds, and give a tinge of sadness to the scene.

Berry had risen from her seat impulsively when Lady Blanche left, and then half-hesitates again. It is such an obvious confession of weakness to fly from his presence so. And yet she feels the danger of remaining. She is not afraid of giving in to his prayers, or of proving weaker than she is wise; but she would not willingly let him know the pain that is in her heart for the love of him. He looks so good and noble, worthy of even more than she has given him. She finds it hard to doubt his honour when thus brought face to face with his candid eyes and the sweet firmness of his mouth, that surely could speak only truth.

"Miss Cardell—Berry!" begins the unconscious culprit, humbly.

But his words break the spell, and end her indecision. With one startled look and an unintelligibly murmured excuse she breaks away

and vanishes inside, leaving him dumbfounded, and more at sea than ever.

Is it that he has been too long in coming, and her pride has thus been hurt? Or are his first suspicions correct, and is she trying to evade the half-promises that she gave, and now has wholly broken? She had led him to come here with a definite ground for hope. Why does she ignore it now?

He would be perhaps justly indignant could he see the girl that evening as she scribbles a pencil note and despatches it with feverish haste. Only two lines, and addressed to Mrs. Chester.

"Send for me at once, John Carew is here."

And yet he would forgive her, even in his wrath, for the hot tears that fall and nearly blur the written words are ample proof that she is suffering too.

She looks too small and delicate to have Eve's battles to fight against the world as well as her own.

After all Captain Carew gains the chance he seeks. It is always difficult to avoid a *tête à tête* when one person is bent upon it and both are living in the same house—in a bungalow it is nearly impossible.

Berry is in the dining-room arranging the flowers for the table when he enters, and standing between her and the door prevents her escape.

"Miss Cardell, may I speak to you a moment?"

"Certainly, Captain Carew! What have you got to say?"

She is rather frightened, but on the whole tolerably self-possessed. There is no moonlight now, nothing seductive in the surroundings to stupify her senses and make her listen to him leniently, even against her will. Amidst these more prosaic surroundings she can defy him, and the arts which won her heart away from her only five months ago.

But now that Captain Carew has permission to speak, and the opportunity is well, words fall him, and he is mute.

"Will—will you give me a flower, Miss Cardell?" he stammers out at length.

"Is that all? Yes, I think I can venture so far, even although they are not mine to give. Which will you have, Captain Carew?"

"If a beggar might be a chooser, I should ask for the one you are wearing," with a world of meaning in his voice, which she at once promptly waives aside.

"But 'beggars mustn't be choosers'; it is a well-known and unanswerable fact. I will give you this instead."

She handed him a rose as she speaks, perfect, it is true, both in hue and form, but certainly far removed from any suspicion of sentiment. The most infatuated lover could scarcely place a flower so full-blown next his heart for ever, or even wear it in his button-hole for an hour.

"It is a magnificent specimen," he observes, rather taken aback.

"Is it not?" she answers, and laughs.

Encouraged by this he advances nearer to her side; but as he moves forward she recedes, keeping the table between them.

"Berry, what welcome have you for me?" he asks, stretching out his hands imploringly.

"A hearty one, of course. I hope I have not been remiss," she returns briskly, and then, with an affectation of cordiality which galls him more than the most open slight, she adds, "It is so nice to meet old acquaintances again. It was only the other day Mr. Blythe turned up unexpectedly as you."

"And you class me with him?" reproachfully.

"Yes; why not? I have known you quite as long! If you feel you do not deserve so much, praise my good nature, do not blame my judgment!"

He glances at her sharply. There is an undertone of earnestness beneath the jest that makes him once more fancy he must have offended her. "You are not vexed with me, Berry?" he questions, anxiously.

"I vexed with you? How could you think it? You were always so good to me! Don't you remember on board ship—"

But she breaks off suddenly. Strong as she thinks herself, she knows she dare not risk

mentioning those days which were so sweet, and have left so sad a memory behind.

"I remember everything on board ship," he replies, gravely; "do you?"

"Of course!" hurriedly. "Mr. Blythe and I had a long talk together of all that happened then."

"All?"

"I think so! I could not be quite sure! Are you putting me through my catechism, Captain Carew?"

"I should like to do so!"

"You would find me very imperfect!"

"I would not care how halting your replies if only you would tell me the truth."

"Truth is an awkward thing, quite out of date!" she begins to quote, carelessly; but something in his manner makes her wait to hear what he will say.

"Hush!" he says, sternly. "Do not make me lose my respect as well as all love for you! Such trifling is unworthy both of you—and me!"

She hangs her head abashed, and likes him better for the rebuke than she had ever done before.

At the same time something she has once read flashes across her memory, and she almost repents it aloud:—"Be not too hasty to admire or to trust the teachers of morality; they discourse like angels, but they live like men!"

"It is so easy to talk!" she remarks, pursuing her meditations. "I beg your pardon!" raising her eyebrows in surprise. "I mean," she explains, "that I have lost all faith in the reality of either truth or constancy!"

"Since when?"

It is on the tip of Berry's tongue to answer,—"Since I knew of your falseness," but she refrains. Instead she answers,—

"Since I have become a woman! I was a child when I knew you first."

"Then I wish you had remained so!" with a sigh.

"Do you?" drily.

She holds a piece of heliotrope in her hand, apparently intent on deciding the relative merits of the two geraniums, one pink and one scarlet, that she places on each side.

"Pink is the prettier," she murmurs, thoughtfully; only meaning to provoke by her assumed indifference to his presence, and succeeding even beyond her desire.

"Miss Cardell, will you give a plain answer to my question? Do you wish to repudiate what you told me on board ship?"

"If it was anything that could have authorised you to speak to me as you are speaking now, I most certainly do," coolly.

He leans across the table to come as near to her as possible, striving to look into the eyes so obstinately bent on the ground.

"Berry, is it so strange a thing that I should interest myself in the sayings and doings of the woman I hoped to make my wife?" he asks, very gently.

She quivers in response. It is so sweet to hear herself called by that name by him, even although it can never really be. Lower and lower droops the head, and she almost reaches out her hand in answer to his appeal.

Seeing his advantage he pursues it.

"If you knew how I have lived upon this meeting—thought about it, dreamed about it—you would not be so cold, so unkind; you would not keep me in suspense."

Still no reply. She claps her fingers round her throat as though choking, and in so doing loosens the purple velvet pander that were fastened there.

They fall unheeded to the floor.

"Let me speak to Mrs. Chester," he goes on pleadingly, thinking not without reason that he is making way with her at last.

Women are so incomprehensible he reflects, so given to fits of shyness in and out of season. But his self-deception is not of long duration. The mention of one sister brings to mind the other—the sister that died for love of this man who stands before her, pleading his own cause as no doubt he pleaded it before with only too great success.

Her face hardens in a moment, and she flashes her big eyes angrily, as she answers hotly,—

"Not on the same subject, if you please. Surely it is enough that I should be insulted thus, and—and bored."

The speech is effectual at once. He falls backward as though stunned.

"Forgive me! I did not know that I was offending. You shall not complain of me again."

He draws himself up stiffly, and makes room for her to go through the door; and stricken almost unto death she passes out.

Once she has gone he relaxes, sinking into a chair and burying his face in his hands.

It is all over. He has put his fate to the test and lost all. Is it a sign of weakness or unmanliness that he stoops and picks the faded flowers from the ground, pressing them passionately to his lips?

Since ever the world was, women have had a power over the hearts of men that not even their own unworthiness could destroy; and John Carew is not the first, who, having given himself up to the thralldom of love, finds it difficult to free himself again.

Not all the falseness he suspects in her, nor the fickleness of which he has proved her guilty, can take away the subtle fragrance of the flower that for even so short a time has nestled in her breast.

And yet the one tear which is wrung from him in his pain might well-nigh have withered it, so full is it of concentrated bitterness and despair.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"I WONDER what has happened to Jack that he is altered so!" muses Lady Blanche, thoughtfully that evening in Berry's room.

"Is he altered?"

"Terribly. He used to be so sunny always; but of course, you did not know him before."

"He has been rather silent to-day, but he seemed all right when he first came," says Berry, looking out a little nervously through the thick masses of nut-brown hair that are falling unconfined about her shoulders.

"Only at first, though. That same evening I noticed a change. I suspect he is in love!"

"What makes you fancy that?" asks a smothered voice from behind a big ivory brush.

"Because men who are usually unimpressible are always in such a far worse plight when they do happen to become victims to the tender passion. It is retribution, I suppose."

"Perhaps," is the somewhat doleful assent.

"I would never forgive a girl who jilted a man like that," goes on Lady Blanche, with determination that almost amounts to fierceness in anyone of her equable temperament.

The girl who has been thus innocently advertised upon blanches guiltily.

"He has been like a brother to me always, and I was an only child!"

"How thankful you ought to be!" is Berry's involuntary exclamation, as the thought occurs to her how it is her sisters, who, living and dead, have seemed to combine against her happiness.

Was there no other man in the world that Margaret should love this one and die for him, leaving her to avenge the wrong? And if Eve thinks love better than all beside, could she not have made the rather trite discovery before it was too late? Catching Lady Blanche's look of surprise, she adds, quickly,—

"Don't you think it near, too! All the love comes to one by right, and all the money, which is better still!"

"I don't remember being overburdened with either!" confesses Lady Blanche.

"Is anyone ever burdened with a superabundance of anything good?" bitterly.

"I wish I could see you married, Berry."

"It is quite on the cards that you may. I seem to be rapidly approaching that no doubt enviable state."

"I meant happily married," corrects the other; "to such a man, for instance, as Captain Carew."

Berry gasps a little at this, but goes on brushing her hair vigorously.

"Of course, that is quite out of the question. I was only wishing it. You are engaged, and he is in love, I know! I want you to stay another week with me, and help to cheer him up."

"It is very good of you," answers the girl, feeling guilty again, this time of hypocrisy; knowing that Eve must even now have received the note in which she has begged to be recalled. All next day she awaits the answer to it; and in the afternoon it comes in the practical form of a carriage to convey her back. The syce has a note for her.

"DEAR BERRY," it runs, "Will you ask Lady Blanche to excuse you from staying longer with her now, and to forgive us for taking you away. We have friends dining to-night and Alex particularly wishes you to be present. With kindest love to Lady Blanche,

"Your affectionate sister,
"Eve."

It has evidently been written under surveillance or with the idea of somehow being seen. But Berry does not trouble about this, it is too great a relief to be free from the strain of weighing each word and act, lest her secret should become known.

If her lover's near neighbourhood is prevented from being a pleasure to her, it must necessarily be a pain. It is positive torture to be with him and not confess the love which he has so ardently solicited. She escapes the further trial of bidding him farewell, as he is out when the letter comes.

As Berry drives back along the shady road, the syce sitting with folded arms and impassive face behind her, she wonders if it can possibly be that only five days have elapsed since she went that way before. Now that she has sent him irrevocably away, she feels as if she could have pardoned any sin in John Carew that was not actually against herself. It seems now foolishly Quixotic to have taken up the cudgels for a wrong committed so long ago; and, after all, Margaret is dead, and nothing can bring back the happiness she has misused. She is spilling all her own existence from an over-wrought sense of honour and what is just.

Then, again, if it is right that she should give him up, surely she might at least keep unnamed! Because she is debared from the best is no very good reason that she should joyfully accept a worse substitute. It is better to have the wholly bad than a half good. Matrimony is no haven (or heaven) in itself; it is the person with whom we try it makes all the difference in the world.

To marry Ronald May, to Berry appears an unmitigated evil. Why to humour a chimerical Eve's, must she give up all that is sweet and holy in her life—the right of memory and grief.

It is a monstrous and unwarrantable sacrifice to require of her. Yet, on the other hand is it not a mockery that when she first heard the story which was the cause of Margaret's sad fate, she had been so justly indignant as to declare her intention of never marrying at all; and that now her resolution is so weakened that she has even contemplated a union with the very man who wrought the wrong.

Once more her mood changes. A sensation of hopelessness creeps over her. Utterly despondent, she asks herself why she should deny to Eve what costs so little to give. What can it matter whether the remnant of her days is spent as maid or wife? She cannot live long, she feels assured; it would be impossible with such a pressure lying heavy on her heart. Let her at least die nobly, not grudging the offering up of the ashes of her life, inasmuch as it will add to the glory of her funeral pyre.

She has almost worked herself up to the enthusiasm of a second Dido, but Raul Tol is no Carthage; and when a horseman pauses, staring curiously at her tear-stained face, she is brought back to herself, and exaggerated heroism is succeeded by a touch of common-sense less exalted perhaps and less rare but more suited to this work-a-day world.

To avoid further unwelcome encounters, which would be inevitable did she proceed along the main road, she gets out of the carriage and sends it home. Then she descends by a narrow path to a lower road, comparatively unfrequented, from which she can also take a short cut home.

It has been raining the night before, and her frock soon becomes wet passing over the dank grass and flaps dolefully about her feet. She almost wishes she had remained comfortably seated in the carriage and risked a possible meeting with anyone she knew.

Being so damp and uninviting she is doubly surprised to find she is not the only adventurous one, and to hear voices near her, only a little way down the khud.

She recognises one as Colonel Chester, and is about to hail and claim his escort home, when something that he says attracts her amazed attention, and she stops spell-bound.

"Have you not injured me enough," he is saying, with repressed bitterness, "that you must risk destroying my present happiness as well?"

"Is it happiness, Alick? Do you know, I was rude enough to doubt it when I saw you together first. That pale-faced girl—pretty enough I grant—scarcely seemed capable of love—such love as I—"

"My wife is not so demonstrative as—as women I have known," he breaks in, stiffly, yet forbearing to give too sharp a point to the sarcasm, perhaps from some rare feeling of pity for her plight.

Berry can see them now. Colonel Chester is standing and glances about him restlessly as though unwilling to remain, and perhaps with an idea of escape. But the woman who is with him, though crouched upon the ground, has laid her two hands upon his feet to detain him, and her eyes are lifted hungrily to his. But she gains from him no crumb of comfort.

"Don't you think we had better bring this ill-advised interview to an end?" he asks, coldly.

"Not yet—oh, Alick! not yet! It is the first time I have troubled you, and will be the last!"

"I hope so!" briefly.

"I wanted so much to hear you speak—to know from your own lips that I was forgiven!" she goes on, with a wistful gentleness that seems impervious to rebuff.

"I have said so. Is not that sufficient, or cannot you let the facts speak for themselves?"

"She is very lovely, I know, and good I am sure," the woman answers, humbly. "But do you love her as you once loved me—and, Alick, does she love you?"

She looks keenly in his face for the truth, and finds it in the involuntary quiver that passes through his frame.

"By what right do you dare to question it?" he asks, furiously.

"Right!" she repeats after him, scornfully; "if it came to that, and I told my story, I fancy she would not dispute my claim. She looks pure and proud enough to concede the point at once—and gladly, if it were not for the shame."

"Shame! how dare you breathe the word in conjunction with her name!" he exclaims, beside himself with wrath.

"Let her be the judge," she suggests, with an accent of malice in her tone, that shows she has not always been so meek as she is now.

"Woman! You would not go to her?"

"No; what would be the good?" she answers, with a sigh. "Since, if you had no other refuge in the world, you would not come to me."

She rises slowly, and turns away as though with the intention of leaving him at once; and, fearful of discovery, Berry only stays to pick up a handkerchief that is lying on the ground at her feet, and speeds swiftly and silently away.

She does not stop to breathe until she reaches Baby's Kingdom, and then she sits down beneath the shady trees, and for the first time allows herself leisure to think. It has all passed so quickly, almost like panoramic shadows, that are gone just as you have discovered what they were meant to represent.

She had only seen the woman's face as she moved to come away; but some instinct had told her all along that it was the "other Mrs. Chester."

She examines the handkerchief half-fearfully, and somehow feels little surprise that it is marked with the name "Alick," and has above the crest she knows so well—a hand upraised.

It is Colonel Chester's crest, and the handkerchief is identical with that she found before his marriage with her sister.

Who can this woman be, and what her past relation with him? Her language had been too warm and impulsive to be that of a sister or anyone connected by the often little-headed ties of blood. And yet other suppositions are too shameful to be entertained. Nor will she readily believe that Colonel Chester would do so much wrong to the woman he pretends to love, as to marry her with another wife alive.

She can only judge from what the woman has said and seemed; it is impossible to gather anything from him. His character and past are hidden too completely and effectually by the mask of indifference he wears, and his carefully contracted habit of self-control. Of whatever the mystery may consist, she herself is powerless to help or interfere; she can only watch and wait, letting the future unravel what it will, choosing its own place and time.

With an idea of postponing the evil day, she tears the handkerchief to tiny shreds and buries them in the ground. Then, removing the still wet soil from her hands, she walks quietly home, reflecting, with a shudder of repulsion, that she will never again willingly go near the place where twice she has been so violently shocked.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BERRY wonders a little that she does not see anything of Eve when she arrives.

"Mem sahib is in her room," the ayah gives her to understand; but when she goes to the door, intending to ask for admittance, Colonel Chester's voice inside deters her. He has reached home first, and she must have stayed longer than she knew on the hill-top brooding over what she had seen.

A second time that day she becomes an unwilling and involuntary listener.

Eve is speaking first, softly and pleadingly as it appears, but her accents are too low to distinguish what she says; then her husband's deeper, angrier tones are heard plainly in reply.

"The matter must be cloaked at once! I will brook no shilly-shallying in my house!"

He has spoken in unmistakable displeasure; while instinctively Berry feels that she has caused his wrath, and wonders what new evil is boded by his words.

Waiting to hear no more, she repairs to her own room and hastily dons an evening gown—the simplest she can find. She wears no flowers. There are none laid out for her, and she does not trouble to ask for them. She is too dispirited and bewildered to make an elaborate toilette, but the pretty piquant face requires so little to set it off, and she looks very sweet and fresh when she is ready to descend.

Eve is in the drawing-room, and when Berry enters she manages to give her a danger signal in the form of an apologetic glance and warning compression of the mouth. More she dare not do, as her husband is in the room, watching their meeting narrowly.

"Hope you were not vexed at our sending for you," says Mrs. Chester, pressing her lips lightly on Berry's cheek as it is presented to her for sisterly greeting.

"Of course, she is only grateful," breaks in Colonel Chester, decidedly. "It is not often young ladies fly from their lovers the very day after betrothal."

"Have you seen Ronald often?" falters Berry, feeling that something is required of her.

"Not once. It was partly on that account we sent for you home. Eve and I were both unwilling that anything should come between you."

"I do not remember expressing an opinion to that effect!" contradicts Eve, coldly.

"Then I have misstated your sentiments!" raising his eyebrows in assumed surprise.

"I did not even think it!" is the petulant reply. "I merely said, and say now, that—that—lovers are best left to their own devices."

"And you need not, certainly, have fear for us, Ronald and I understand each other perfectly," interposes Berry, with decision.

Colonel Chester looks at her, to see if he can detect the intention of any double meaning in her words; but she is leaning back in a low arm-chair, and her face is hidden behind the huge black fan she is waving to and fro.

"I am delighted to hear," he returns, with a sarcasm which denotes nothing of the pleasure expressed, "that matters have righted themselves since—since you wrote that letter!"

Both sisters flushed angrily—as they always do at any reference to that unfortunate occurrence.

Eve rises, and placing herself before a mirror turns the conversation to a more congenial subject.

"Is my dress very unbecoming?" she asks, anxiously. "I do so detest dead white."

Certainly she has gone to the uttermost verge of what is considered complimentary to one's relations to wear after their decease.

The soft, white Indian muslin gown is so decidedly a cream white that it almost approaches to a yellow; and yellow roses, whose outside leaves are sweetly-tinted pink, nestle wherever they can find a place, clustering in her golden hair, and lying close to her snowy, heaving breast.

"You ought to have lived in the golden age, when giants were upon the earth and the sons of Heaven came down and married the daughters of men, seeing that they were very fair!" declares Berry, with an unwonted accession of enthusiasm which vents itself in exalted speech. "You are too fair for these prosaic times. It is absurd you should be married to a merely mortal man!"

Colonel Chester does not seem offended at the praise, which in a degree might be said to reflect unflatteringly upon himself. He is too passionately proud of his beautiful wife. Eve blushes and looks pleased, but thinks it only modest to demur.

"I was talking of my gown," she objects, purging up her lips to conceal a rippling smile.

"Ah! if you mean that," says Berry, experiencing a quick reaction after her somewhat extravagant laudation, "that is about as much mourning—or less—that an old maid would wear for a favourite cat!"

Eve frowns, and Colonel Chester laughs; but before either can speak the door opens and an arrival is announced.

It is the first big dinner they have given since Berry has been with them, and the girl is amused and interested at all she sees. It is what in India is called a "burra khana," and all the burra sahibs with their no less burra mem-sahibs have been invited, and in most cases have also come.

Ronald May is the last to arrive, and directly Colonel Chester has whispered the few words that consigns Berry to his care, the guests troop into the dining-room.

The table is a mass of soft-hued flowers and ferns, which reflect themselves in the polished glass and silver, and in the mirror plateaux laid beneath. All the linen is like snow—so white and smooth; and the place is brought to such a pitch of brightness that the least speck would have been noticed and doubled in its sheen.

Berry smiles as she remembers the unpalatable feast to which Colonel Chester had been invited before he married. She wonders if Eve has ever compared it with these daintier entertainments she has it now in her power to give.

Some dozen or more himatghars are in the room, some tambling over each other in their efforts to be of service, some standing with folded arms behind their master's chairs—a favourite attitude of repose.

But if they are inferior to the much-abused British domestic in point of energy, at least appearances are in their favour; they are ornamental, if not useful, and their sometimes irri-

tating, dignified calm is always preferable to the cockneyism that peeps out in every whispered query of the half-educated Saxon.

The servants of the house are conspicuous among the rest in a pretty, fanciful livery that adds to the brightness of the room. Eve likes to see them well appointed, and spends much trouble and time, besides many rupees, in keeping them so strikingly trim—always a difficult matter with a native.

They have a primitive idea that clothes were meant for warmth and not decoration (as Carlyle has it in *Sartor Resartus*). This idea they carry out by sleeping in them, if possible, in their little smoke-begrimed huts, or by other equally destructive misuses.

Berry has ample time for thought, for Ronald is utterly nonplussed and silent, while her other neighbour, Mr. Blythe, is never in a hurry to speak. Looking round she sees Eve smiling sweetly on the two veterans on either side of her, while even Colonel Chester, taciturn as he usually is, exerts himself to be agreeable, and succeeds in being a better host than might have been expected.

It is often that a reserved man falls in courtesy from the notion that he is overlooked and nothing required of him; but once placed the shyest man in a prominent position, and he will not disgrace the choice—indeed his politeness will be the more genuine that it has not been spread over so much ground.

The girl shudders as she thinks of the secret—perhaps crime—that in this case lies behind that impassive, undemonstrative exterior. She feels as if she had entered into Bluebeard's chamber, and that somewhere there must be an indelible stain which will betray her fatal knowledge. She looks down apprehensively at her hands—one lying listless in her lap, the other toying with her spoon.

"Why don't you wear rings!" asks Mr. Blythe, in his slow, deliberate manner, not condescending to observe the usual forms of opening speech.

"For the very best reason of all, because I have none," returns Berry, without evincing any symptom of proper shame at the avowal.

"I wish you would let me give you one!"

The suggestion is put with a certain thoughtfulness and a slight tremor of deeper meaning in his voice. Berry thinks it better to take no notice, and begins calmly to discuss her tinned fish, the unwholesome edible which is actually considered a desirable luxury in this benighted land.

"It was awfully good of your sister to let me sit near you," he pursues, presently. "They generally send me in with the General's niece, with a vague idea, I suppose, of keeping me in the office."

"She is very pretty," says Berry, as quasi-hostess, affecting an interest she does not feel.

"Great heavens!" he ejaculates, in an agony of surprise.

Then Berry looks again in her direction—this time with a more scrutinizing glance.

She is a pale-faced girl, with prominent eyes and a limited quantity of fine, flaxen hair.

The only thing noticeable about her is her costume, which has been evidently produced in England, and shows up well against the drizzle-made gowns worn by the older Anglo-Indians.

"She dresses well!" is the subsequent half-apologetic observation.

"So she ought. She is wearing out two trousseaux. She has been on the eve of marriage twice, and each time with one of her uncle's A.D.C.'s."

"Take care, Mr. Blythe!" warningly.

But he treats her advice with silent scorn, feeling that he possesses a safeguard in his really sincere affection for herself, and vexed that she should so far ignore the same as to deem any caution necessary.

And all this time Ronald has not said a word. Dessert is being handed round, when, unable longer to bear the suspense, Berry addresses him herself, tired of waiting for the tidings he does not seem inclined to give.

"Well?" she asks him, impatiently.

"I wish it were well," gloomily.

"Is there no chance of release—without re-awakening his suspicions?"

"I thought he had forgotten all about it!"

"And so did I—until to-night."

"And now?"

"I am afraid he is in earnest. I think we shall have some difficulty in escaping from the net in which he has caught us."

Colonel Chester is looking in their direction, and Berry's voice is very low as she questions again,—

"Does anyone else know about it?"

"It is more than probable Mrs. Lee-Brooke spread the report. Several people have congratulated me."

"And you—what did you say?" anxiously.

"I tried to laugh it off, in the hope it might all come right without the necessity of such a tremendous sacrifice."

"Of course it must," says Berry, confidently, no whit offended by his evident anxiety to elude the responsibilities he had so rashly brought upon himself.

Indeed, it would be difficult to feel anything but compassion for him, seeing how his handsome face has altered and aged these last eighteen months.

"Who is that fellow trying to monopolize you?" whispers Mr. Blythe in Berry's other ear, with a queer mixture of jealousy and self-complacency, not for a moment seriously thinking that he can possibly have a rival in her favour.

She is about to reply, when Colonel Chester, catching her eye, rises to his feet.

"Before the ladies leave, may I propose a lady's health—that of my sister-in-law, Miss Cardell, and Mr. May—coupled."

There is a momentary silence, then a confused buzz of voices.

Ronald half gets up, and then reseats himself.

After all, what is there to say?

Berry at first only feels a suppressed gleam of mirth at Mr. Blythe's astonished face when his question receives this unexpected reply.

She even touches her champagne glass with the mechanical intention of raising it to her lips, but the ice that is in it rattling from side to side tells her what she would scarcely have known without some such intimation—how her hand is shaking with half-unconscious agitation.

She has heard as in a dream—almost as though someone else were the subject under discussion; now in a moment she realises what it all means, how the meshes are tightening about her.

Giving a low, quick gasp she jumps up quickly, and without a word flies from the room.

She has not waited to see the indignation of the Commissioner's wife, who is a sovereign hold-all undisputed sway on her own ground, and has no idea of anyone daring even here to leave the table before the hostess has given a signal to her august self, and who consequently remains in a repressed state of wrath for the rest of the evening.

She only hears Colonel Chester's laugh pursuing her like a fiendish echo, as he says something about "young ladies' shynesses being their own excuse."

The next moment she is out of sight and hearing, and appears no more that night.

Everyone glances at Ronald—how will he reply to this public announcement that has caused such unflattering distress to the lady whose name has been thus unexpectedly linked to his own.

He starts up, meeting his Colonel's eyes fearfully, and answering with a sternness that ails strangely on his naturally laughing face.

But that he does not speak without an effort is palpable from his white, quivering lips, and the fact that he holds tightly to the table for support.

"I can scarcely thank you, sir, for proposing our healths without, at least, first consulting Miss Cardell. I think it is self-evident that she would rather have chosen her own time for communicating it to her friends; and—of course her will is my law."

He ends his speech rather lamely, and, as he

sits down, thrusts his hands in his pockets with that defiant air Englishmen generally adopt on such occasions.

Mrs. Chester, making the move, effectually puts an end to the somewhat embarrassing scene, and after the ladies have passed out it is not renewed.

When all the guests are gone, Eve walks slowly into her room. The flowers are still unfaded in her hair and at her breast, but they are almost the only sign of life. Her face is very white and still, and though the night is warm almost to suffocation, her hands are cold like ice.

She raises her eyes to the mirror. It is such a little time since she took pleasure in that reflection, but now she almost regrets the fairness that can never more be praised by the lover that she loves. If it had only been the saying of farewell she might have sorrowed in secret, and in the end forgotten; but to see him day by day, knowing that he is doubly lost in that he belongs to another, and that other her sister, is more than she can bear. And yet she might win him to her side with a look, only she will never try. In spite of her many faults she is too good, and, notwithstanding the tenderness of words and ways, which with her is more habit than affection, too cold. She pushes back the hair from her face, and, bending close to the glass, looks into her own eyes. Not a tear has fallen to dim their lustre—it would be too grateful a relief. They are so dry and burning, and she wonders there is no more apparent change. They are only sorrowful and very wistful, for—

"The eyes that cannot weep
Are the saddest eyes of all."

And Eve lately has had close acquaintanceship with perplexity and grief.

A footstep falls lightly on the floor behind her, but she does not turn her head, thinking it is her sister.

"Berry, I am growing very old," she observes, plaintively, characteristically touching on her own troubles first.

An arm steals round her waist, and one hand is placed beneath her chin to raise it for inspection in the glass.

"You are lovelier than ever!" says her husband. "My wife is always the loveliest woman in the room, wherever she may be."

She reddens with surprise, and tries to break from him, or at least avoid his gaze, but his strong right hand holds her fast and compels her to meet his glance. It is full of passion, anger and love combined, each stronger for the presence of the other, and in the consciousness of wrong-doing she quells beneath it, cowering.

"Is your dislike so great that the very sight of me is hateful?" he asks, bitterly.

"I—I do not hate you!" trembling.

"Neither do you love!"

She is mute. A quiver that might be engendered either by repulsion or by terror passes through her frame. That is all.

"At least you are sincere in this—you do not pretend affection, having it not."

"Why should I?" faintly, with a vague idea of trying to find out how much he knows.

"You are aware of what might have been a reason, I make no doubt."

Her eyes droop and she mutters some unintelligible words.

"Do not trouble to excuse yourself, there is no occasion," he observes, with emphasis, and a certain amount of menace she is not slow to understand; "and so long as matters remain as they are now you need have no fear!"

She dares not affect to misunderstand, and the startled look she casts upon him is met by one of such fierce affection that she grows first hot, then once more deadly cold. What if in jealousy he should slay her thus as she stands! She lifts her hands in what involuntarily becomes an imploring gesture, then, seeing the action reflected, lets them fall again to her side.

For a moment he gazes at her strangely. Though he more than suspects her faithfulness, his love is no whit lessened by his scorn, and he still craves a return with wild, unsatisfied

longing. At a sign he would forgive her all, but that sign she will not give.

For a moment he is undecided whether to tax her with her fault or not—whether to abandon the more refined cruelty of his revenge for a hastier retribution. But it is for a moment only. He cannot speak the words which might sever them for ever; knowing the depths of his own feelings he dare not risk her loss. He would rather keep her with him even cold and loveless as she is now, at all hazards and at all costs.

He crushes her against his breast and kisses her again and again with ungentle fervour; his dark, handsome face glowing above her like a hawk over a captured dove.

"My wife!" he whispers, passionately, "you are all mine—mine, body and soul!"

(To be continued.)

THE TRUE TEST.

—101—

"Yes, I repeat it—the man I marry must be young, handsome, of good family, and wealthy."

Lilly Seemore—the young heiress, wheeled round on the music stool, shook back her long golden curls, and looked up archly into the dark handsome face of Clide Ellings, the rich young broker, whom, Madam Gossp said, would surely win the fair young heiress.

"But, Miss Seemore, if you really loved a man, and he happened to be poor, would your answer be the same?" he asked, looking down into the lovely blue eyes that were uplifted to his face, sparkling with mischief.

Something in the glance of his dark eyes, as he bent them upon her, caused the blue eyes to droop beneath his gaze, and the crimson tide to dye the fair cheeks, making her appear more beautiful.

"Yes, the very same," she replied with a saucy toss of her head. "The one that I will honour with my hand must be a perfect Adonis, I can assure you."

"Miss Desota, what is your opinion on the subject?" said Clide, turning to Lilly's music teacher.

Mabel Desota was a tall, beautiful brunette, with large, dreamy brown eyes, wavy chestnut hair, features as perfect in their beauty as though chiselled from a piece of marble, and laughing rosebud lips that made one think of ripe cherries.

"If you please," she answered, with a rare, sweet smile, "I would rather not express my opinion."

"Mr. Ellings may excuse you, but I won't; so come, let us hear your ideas on the subject," exclaimed Lilly, as she caught the little hand which rested on the piano, and held it tightly between her own delicate white ones.

"Well, since you insist upon it, I will say that I think if two persons really and truly love each other, they should not let gold divide them."

"Spoken like a true woman," cried Clide Ellings, as he stepped forward, and catching her hand, raised it gallantly to his lips.

He glanced at her as he released her hand, and he saw the colour deepen in her cheeks, the eyes droop, and the crimson lips part with a sweet smile, revealing the white teeth.

Lilly Seemore only smiled. Releasing her clasp on the music teacher's hand, she began to play a lively air.

"Your lesson is over, Miss Seemore," said Mabel Desota, drawing on her gloves.

Clide Ellings took up his hat, and bowing low to Lilly, he bade her good morning, and left her presence in company with her music teacher.

Clide parted with Mabel at the door of her boarding-house, having obtained her permission to call on her some evening.

On the way to his office his thoughts were filled with Lilly Seemore—the fair young heiress, and Mabel Desota, the music teacher. But when he entered, the fair sweet face of Lilly had entirely faded from his mind, and in its place rose up the dark bewildering beauty of Mabel Desota.

His agent, a dried-up, wearied-faced old lawyer,

to whom Clide entrusted the management of his investments, was waiting when he entered.

"Well, Musting," he said, as he threw himself into an easy chair, after shaking hands with the little old man, "what's the news?"

The old lawyer drew out his red silk handkerchief, wiped his face several times, folded it, and replaced it carefully in his hat. After a slight cough or two to clear his throat, he began to speak.

"My young friend, I have bad news to tell you."

"Bad news! Speak, Musting, and tell me what it is!"

"The Landal Bank is suspended, and every shilling deposited therein is lost."

"The Landal Bank suspended! Great Heaven, Musting, I am ruined!" exclaimed Clide, springing from his seat, and beginning to pace the narrow limits of the office with frantic strides.

"Sit down, Clide," said the lawyer, "and let me tell you. It is not half as bad as you suppose."

Clide sank into a chair, and waited for his agent to speak.

"Don't you remember telling me to try and purchase the Dane property, valued at £50,000?"

"Yes," replied Clide, in a husky voice; "but almost every farthing that I possessed of cash in the world was in that bank."

"Well," continued the agent, without seeming to hear him, "I have purchased the property, and paid the whole amount one week ago. You will only lose about two thousand pounds."

"Musting!"

Clide had bounded from his seat, and grasping the old lawyer's hand shook it heartily in silence. So great was his astonishment and joy that he was unable to speak.

"If I had known that the danger was so near at hand, I would have drawn every farthing; but I did not suppose that the crash would come for a couple of months. The news has spread like wildfire, and I heard several eminent gentlemen say that it would ruin you for ever. I think I had better go out and deny those false reports."

Clide did not answer for a moment, then looking up with a smile, he said,—

"No, Musting, my dear old friend; I think I will let the world believe me ruined for a few days. It will be a splendid opportunity to test my friends. Don't you think so?"

"Well, no—yes; but do just as you like, my boy—just as you like," said the agent, as he rose from his chair, put on his hat, and after talking to Clide for a few moments, left his office, with a smile on his wrinkled old face, and a brisk step.

"Won't Lilly Seemore be happy when she hears it—happy that she told me plainly that she would never marry a poor man!" mused Clide, as he leaned back in his easy-chair.

"But dark-eyed, beautiful Mabel—to her true woman's heart I will turn for sympathy. I know that she loves me, and when we are married I will tell her the truth. Yes, it is she I love, and not Lilly, the proud heiress. How fortunate it is that I did not make a fool of myself by declaring my love for her, as I would undoubtedly be discarded as soon as she heard of my loss of wealth; and she would accept some rich suitor, while I would become the laughing-stock of her circle. But yet," he added, aloud, "I can scarcely drive her sweet face away. She was so beautiful and so winning."

Ill news always flies fast; and so it was with the intelligence of Clide's ruin. Before evening nearly every one of his friends had heard of his great loss, and it was currently reported that he was totally ruined. Among the number who were first to hear of it were Lilly Seemore and Mabel Desota.

Two days passed, and Clide had not left his home. He denied himself to all who called. On the evening of the second day he dressed himself carefully and went out to call on Mabel Desota, and ask her to become his wife and share his poverty.

The servant ushered him into the parlour,

and went to find Miss Desota. In a few moments she entered, looking very lovely in a robe of wine-coloured silk. When she saw Clide she held out her little hand, and, smiling sweetly, let him lead her to the sofa. When they were seated, Clide pressed the hand which he held between his own, and leaning over said,—

"Miss Mabel, you have, I presume, heard of my great loss!"

"Yes, I have heard that you are ruined," she answered, trying to withdraw her hand.

"Mabel, I love you. Will you be my wife and share my poverty?"

She laughed softly as she pulled her hand away, and trying to avoid his eyes, she said,—

"Mr. Elings, it is all nonsense to talk about love and poverty. Don't you remember the old saying that when poverty flies in at the door love flies out at the window? I never intend to marry a poor man. I have seen and known enough of poverty. If you were rich I would marry you before any one in the world; but since you have become poor, it would be the greatest folly for me to lose the brilliant prospect I have in view by marrying you. Let us part friends."

She rose and held out her hand to Clide, but he did not take it. For a moment he stood looking at her, and then he laughed a low, scornful laugh, and, bowing before the beautiful but heartless woman, he turned and left the room.

When he reached home he found a letter waiting for him from Lilly Seemore, containing the request that he would oblige her by calling at home for a few moments that evening.

He pressed the note to his lips, for now he knew that it was Lilly that he really loved, and his passion for the heartless music teacher was only a flame that had sprung up in a day and died out as quickly. He was determined to put his love for Lilly aside, and meet her as a friend.

He had humbled himself to one woman, and he would never leave it in the power of another to refuse him.

Lilly met him in the hall, and after they had entered the parlour, she looked up at him with a timid smile, and a sweet, pleading expression in her blue eyes that touched Clide to the heart.

"Mr. Elings," she began, in a soft voice, "papa told me yesterday of your great loss. He called to see you both yesterday and to-day, but you were not in, the servant said, and I—I have some ten thousand pounds more than I want, and you will do me a great favour if you will accept the money and pay it back whenever you like. And—oh, Mr. Elings, I am so sorry that—"

She held out her right hand towards him, and, covering her eyes with her left hand, she burst into a fit of weeping that was beyond her power to control.

"Oh, Lilly, my darling!"

Clide had caught her in his arms, and was pressing warm kisses on her fair face. With her head pillowed on his breast, he told her of his love for her, and asked her if she would become his bride!

"But remember, my love, that I am poor," he said, as he kissed her flushed cheek.

"I love you, Clide, and it matters not to me whether you are rich or poor. You have all the riches that I desire—a spotless character, and a noble, generous heart."

"But, dearest, you said that you would never marry a poor man."

"Oh, Clide, did you not know me better than that? It was not rich in money that I meant—it was rich in having the blessings and gifts of Heaven."

"I was blind, my Lilly, but I am no longer," he murmured, as he sealed his promises on the sweet lips of his betrothed wife.

In a few weeks they were married, and great was the astonishment of the bride and all of Clide's friends when Lilly was conveyed to a large town house, and told by her happy husband that it was her own—his first gift to her.

When Mabel Desota heard that Clide was still a rich man, and that his reported loss was merely a ruse, she was deeply chagrined, and often re-

panted her own folly in letting such a rare chance slip through her fingers.

In two months after Clide's wedding she married an old man of sixty, who was worth a million, but there is always a look of sorrow on the beautiful face.

Clide Elings and his lovely wife never regretted the test which mated them for life.

WHAT LIES BEYOND?

—107—

CHAPTER XXIX.

"MOTHER!" Mona called; then she stood motionless, transfixed upon the threshold.

The room was in all things as though she had left it but yesterday, even so the figure in its furthest corner, rocking to and fro before the fireless grate, and from time to time giving utterance to a low moan.

The coarse, sun-burned face had blanched to an awful pallor; the skin seemed to hang loosely upon the unwieldy body; the hands, once so busy, now lay idly locked; the restless feet were still.

"Mother!" repeated Mona, in low, sweet tones, as though mutely pleading for love and recognition.

At the second utterance of her name the figure turned, but no longer with eyes listless and vacant.

Hate, rather than anger, gleamed from under the heavy brows—hate, malignant and fostered—hate which gradually communicated itself to every feature, until there was turned to the shrinking girl a basilisk face of stone.

"Mother!" she said again; but now her voice trembled. "Don't! don't!" and she raised both hands as though warding off a blow.

"Viper!" answered the woman, the word hissing through the silence of the room. "Viper! Begone! out of my sight for ever!"

"What have I done, mother, that you should be so bitter?" pleaded Mona. "Tell me my fault, and let me win forgiveness. I have no one but you, mother—no one in the wide world. Oh, I want to love you; I have perhaps never loved you as I ought to. Father is dead; you are alone. Take me to your heart, mother! Let us comfort each other!"

Brokenly, imploringly, the words fell from her lips.

As Mona spoke them the woman rose slowly to her feet, and drew herself to her full height, pointing with an outstretched finger to the door.

"Leave me!" she commanded. "I have no fine words, no fine phrases, at my tongue's end with which to answer you; but if prayer of mine could be of worth I would see you drop dead at my feet, and thrust from under them your lifeless body; but that would not bring Rob back—not even that!" she said, ending in a wall of grief.

"Mother," cried the girl, "if I could give my life for his, I would!"

"You lie!" screamed the woman. "You killed him! you murdered him! May Heaven brand you with the brand of Cain! May the curse for ever follow you! May you one day die as wretchedly as he died! May all your life be a living death! May—"

"Mother! mother!" moaned Mona, trying to silence the words which fell like blows; "I am your child! Have pity! have pity!"

"My child! mine? No! Ah, you poor sport of the ocean, that the devil tempted me to pick from the waves, did you think my blood was in your veins? Did you so pollute the name of mother and father that you dared suppose they might be owned by such as you? You are no child of mine. Thank Heaven for that!"

"Tell me—in mercy, tell me what you mean?"

"And who are you that pleads for mercy? Did you give him mercy when you placed the blood-hounds on his path, and drove him to his death—he who picked you up out of the water

and brought you to me, telling me to care for you, in place of the dead child gone from my breast? There were papers tied about your waist, and a necklace of jewels, and around your neck, on a cord, the picture of a woman. She must have been your mother. Go to her—find her! Upon me you have no further claim!"

In dumb amazement Mona had drunk in the incredulous meaning of the uttered words. Was the woman mad! Her own head was reeling. She felt the room going round and round with her.

Exhausted, she tottered a step forward, and sank into a chair; but her white, suffering face awoke no pity in the stony gaze fixed upon her. The woman made a menacing gesture.

"Go!" she repeated. "The air stifles me while you are here! Oh, I have prayed that I might never look upon your face again! I have never loved you, though many's the time I've shuddered you from his anger. I wish now his hand had long ago felled you to the earth, where you belonged. Fool that I was to stay it! You was always grand and mighty with your airs! He was fool enough to be proud of 'em, and say it was the blood in you that told—the blood that killed him! Go, I say—go, or I will drive you!"

The face above her now was livid with concentrated fury, but the girl had no strength to rise.

Would the excited woman strike her! Would the blow kill! Would death be better than life!

Rallying her sinking energies, she put her hand in her breast, and drew forth the box.

"I have brought you this," she said. "I have not opened it. It was father's. It now belongs to you."

The woman snatched it hungrily, and threw back the lid. Outside the hut the sun was sinking, but in an instant its thousand myriad rays were reflected within from the sparkling stones disclosed to view.

"The glass—the glittering glass!" she said. "And it is mine at last—mine at last!"

Then, lifting it from its bed, she caught sight of the miniature and papers beneath. These she threw with a gesture of unspeakable hatred into Mona's lap.

"These are yours. These belong to you. The woman was drowned who was your mother. We buried her when her body was washed ashore. It was the devil's luck you weren't drowned with her!"

What feeble heavenly ray of hope had lighted in Mona's heart, to go out into sudden darkness at these words!

She had then no living mother, only a dead memory, and the awful curse of one whom she had ever given that sacred name. It fell unconscious from her lips now.

"Mother!" she said, "I cannot understand you. Tell me what you mean. Then I will obey you, and will go away where you need never see me more. Am I in very truth not your child?"

"No! You hear me! No! One night, full sixteen years ago, there was a storm on the coast and a wrecked ship. Somewhere there were wreck-fires lighted, but if it be so, there never was no proof. I was alone in the hut, just come in drenched from the shore, when Rob followed me with you in his arms."

"It's a baby, mother," he said. "Washed ashore with, I think, some life in her. Bring her to. It may be worth our while."

"Well, I worked over you for an hour. Ah, if I had known you then, I would have carried you back to the water's edge and given the waves their own; but you came to. You were dressed all in fine linen and lace, with the jewels about your waist and the picture about your neck. In the night your mother's body was washed ashore and we had her buried. I never meant to keep you, but Rob wouldn't give ye up."

"She belongs to rich folks," he said. "Some of these days, maybe, they'll come to claim her, and then an extra mouth don't cost nothing, and it may be a good turn for us, mother. We'll never let on but what she's ours, and bide our time."

"You was toddling round then, and just beginning to talk. We asked you your name, and you told us Mona, so you see you've only yourself to thank for what you've so often blamed me. After that we moved here, away from the old place, where no one knew us, and everyone thought you really belonged to us.

"We'll never want, mother," Rob would say, when I often asked him why he burdened himself with another mouth. 'The child's brought a fortune with her.'

"A fortune!" she repeated, scornfully, "in a lot of glass beads; but they're pretty—I like to see them shine!"

Her look of fury melted to one of half-childish pleasure as she held up the stones to see them sparkle.

"They are not glass, mother," said Mona, "but diamonds. You might sell them and live like a lady all your life; but they are yours. I give them all to you, if ever they were mine to give. You have earned them by your faithful care of me. Mother, I did not mean to wrong you ever. It was through no fault of mine father was captured. Will you not believe this? Will you not let me stay with you for a little while?"

Again came the old hatred creeping back into the woman's eyes, as they turned from the jewels to the girl who had been to her a daughter for so many years.

"Though you were starving," she said, "I would not give you a crust. Though the waves were at my very door I would drive you out to meet them. Though you were naked and freezing I would not throw you a rag to cover ye, nor a stick to warm ye! You hear me! Go!" Tremblingly Mona rose from her chair.

"There is no room for you in your father's house!"

These words again sounded in her ears as she turned, with touching pathos, to the frenzied woman.

"You say that the waves will resolve me, mother. I think that I will go to them. But do not curse me. Say that you forgive me. Kiss me, just once!"

For answer she felt a hard, cold grip upon her arm. In another instant she was thrust out, falling, almost fainting, on the sands, while the cottage door closed with a bang, and the rusty bolt grated as it was pushed to in its socket.

CHAPTER XXX.

It was dark—quite dark—when Mona opened her weary eyes. No light glimmered in the hut; no sound broke the stillness save the roar of the ocean lashing the rocks. In her ears appeared sweetest music.

Each wave, as it came tumbling in, seemed to cling to her the siren's song—each retreating billow to chant a dirge of disappointment.

With great effort she dragged herself to her feet, and step by step, as though impelled by an unseen force, approached nearer the water's edge. In the darkness she drew from her breast, where she had thrust it, with the papers, the miniature, and pressed her lips against the unseen face.

"Mother," she whispered, "you will plead with Heaven for my pardon."

Then she restored it to its place, and went on. The next wave must lap her feet. The tide was rising. She would stand quiet. The tide must come to her. She would not go to it.

At this moment one bright star came forth in its glittering majesty—one golden speck in the firmament above her—when, between herself and it, there shaped itself out of the surrounding darkness, the vision which had come to her on her first night in prison.

Again she saw the wondrous beauty of that woman's face; again the word mother whispered itself to the night breezes, falling from her lips like a prayer; a soft hand seemed to stroke her brow.

The tide had reached her now; her feet were

wet with the heralding wave; but, as she had advanced, so she receded step by step.

When she was beyond all danger, she realised how near she had been to fatal peril, and fell upon her knees with a great thanksgiving in her soul, but no words would come at her bidding.

"Mother! mother!" was the only word that she could say amid her sobs.

But Heaven knew it was a prayer, even as it heard and answered it. She was stronger when she rose, and the question forced itself upon her—whither should she now turn? She was indeed homeless. From afar off glimmered the lights of Sea View.

There Claire was awaiting her—there she had almost promised to return; but there was, also, Kate Mayhaw, with cruel scorn. Bernard French was there, too, left alone with Claire, whom he must love. Her presence but prevented Claire's real happiness. No! Sea View could no longer be her home. Claire would understand, and be grateful one day, though not comprehending it now. She would go back to the city. Her scanty hoard would take her there, at least, and once there she would seek work and find it.

The road back to the railway station was long and toilsome. Her way led her past the fatal cave. Unconsciously she passed it by. It rose, grim and towering—Rob Foster's monument.

When she reached the station her little strength was all gone. It stood cheerless and dark. But one train passed, and she must wait for that until the early grey of the morning.

Too exhausted to take note of time, she started when it came snorting up, and, as soon as she had taken her seat again relapsed into a sort of stupor, from which it was difficult to rouse her even for the necessary changes, or when the terminus was reached.

Utterly bewildered she stood in the great city station. The noise and confusion seemed new to her. She would have almost welcomed the retreat of a prison.

She staggered as she walked. Then she remembered that, for more than twenty-four hours, she had not taken food. She saw passers-by regard her curiously. Many were haunted by the memory of the white, wan, but exquisitely beautiful face, with its expression of almost mortal sadness.

Just without the station was a restaurant. Blindly she entered it, and pointed to some simple dish upon the bill of fare presented to her. It was the first she had ever seen.

The food brought, she began to realise the pangs of hunger from which she so unconsciously had suffered. Its craving satisfied, she felt somewhat strengthened and refreshed.

Whither should she next direct her steps? Where lay her head to-night?

When she had paid for her meal there were but a few pieces of silver left in her purse. But though possessed of the wealth of Orléans, how should she find shelter, alone, desolate and unprotected, in this great city!

Even Paul Millar had deserted her. She had seen him but for a minute before she had left the prison to go to Claire, and then he had said to her:

"I have failed, Mona, to make your happiness in my way. I now go to try and make it in your own. I leave you with friends—you will not mislead me. Good-bye! Heaven bless you! And, when it all comes right, say, 'Tous Paul proved his love.' I think I shall hear those words, though there rolled between us the boundless sea of eternity."

A tear had fallen on her hand, as he had bent to kiss it. She had had no word from him since.

Then she found the waiters looking at her wonderingly. She must no longer sit there. Alone, friendless, and beautiful, the darkness was less fraught with danger than the light.

Inquiring her way to the nearest hotel she dragged there her weary steps. The hall porter regarded her suspiciously; but, in spite of her weariness, there was a calm, proud look on the pale face that made questioning seem insult, and she soon found herself alone, in a comfortable room, where she might find rest at least until the morning. Her funds would not admit of her staying here longer than that, but to-morrow she could find perhaps a more humble lodging, until she could obtain work.

Falling in this latter purpose she dared not think ahead. She had shut herself out even from the ocean's cold embrace. The ocean! With the memory thus recalled, there came other memories—of the story told her by her adopted mother—of the miniature and the papers in her breast—of the cruel, fierce resentment the woman had betrayed.

She drew from her bosom her unseen and unknown treasures. Almost holding her breath, and overcome with emotion, she held up the picture to her gaze.

The lovely dark eyes smiled up at her; the exquisite mouth appeared to wish to speak. The beauty of the painted face dazzled her, and yet there was something about it strangely familiar.

She fell upon her knees, pressing the picture to her lips, hot tears streaming down her cheeks and sobs of thankfulness in her throat. This was her mother—this the breast which once had sheltered her—these the arms which once had enfolded her! Not the woman who had thrust her out into the world—not the woman whom she had called mother all these years.

Ah, she remembered now what made this face familiar! It was the vision she had had in prison—the vision which had held her back from death, when she would willingly have sought it. The innate longing she had always felt had been Heaven-given, then. It had been her right, her heritage. Rob Foster's disgrace no longer clung to her—she might at last wipe it out; but what mattered it! He would never know the truth—he who had doubted her. Oh, cruel doubt! oh, cruel he! But the papers—they might tell her something further.

Eagerly she unfolded them. One was the marriage certificate between Clarence M— (the action of the water had blotted out the latter name—the name so all-important for her to know, but of which only the first letter was discernible) and Eleanor Gray. The other, the birth certificate of a little girl baptised Mona! And this child was herself. Her baby prattling of her name had been the right one. She repeated it softly over and over to herself, remembering as she did so the night Bernard French had admired her name. Oh, that the waters might have spared her, too, or that she might bend pityingly down from her heavenly home, and beckon for her child to share it!

"Mother! mother!" sobbed the girl, throwing herself upon the bed, clasping the portrait close-pressed against her heart. "It is Mona—your little Mona—who calls you, and you will not answer."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE morning after Claire's return to Sea View broke beautiful and bright; but Claire herself came into the breakfast-room with a troubled look on her fair face, and traces of sleeplessness in the blue eyes. Bernard French looked up as she entered, thinking, half-wonderingly, what a new charm her presence gave the room; then his quick glance detected that something was amiss.

"What has happened?" he questioned, eagerly, in a low tone, as he advanced to welcome her.

"Nothing," Claire replied; "only I am strangely nervous this morning. I have reproached myself a hundred times for permitting Mona to go alone to the cottage; only she seemed so eager, so determined, that I thought, perhaps, it was best to humour her, but I should have followed her last night. Her mother was so vindictive against her, so bitter, that she might not have given her shelter. But Mona surely would have come then to me?" The latter

PATCHWORK.

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sentence was half-assertion, half-question. "I am going there directly after breakfast," she continued, "and I am determined not to return without her. Oh, if anything has happened, I never can forgive myself!"

"I do not think you need fear anything," said Bernard, adding, as though an unwilling confession: "I, too, was somewhat restless last night, and finding I could not sleep, walked to the hut. All was darkness and silence. Doubtless Mona was within, sleeping quietly; perhaps her mother, with softened heart, keeping watch beside her!"

"How he loves her!" Claire thought, with one little, quick, jealous pang, which she sent swiftly back, burning with shame, into its hiding-place.

"How could he help loving her!" came the noble after-thought. "Is she not worthy the love of any man—my beautiful, peerless friend? It was like you," she said, aloud. "Heaven grant you may be right!"

Miss Mayhew was absent from the breakfast-table—absent from Sea View itself. A note, on Claire's return, stated that Kate's delicate nerves could no longer bear the associations connected with the place, and that she had gone home, hoping change would restore her nervous system, and advising Claire to join her in town at as early a date as possible, and try to forget that low-born girl, against whom she had given warning from the first, and who had been the cause of all their trouble.

The writer was scarcely worthy of the bitter indignation of Sea View's young mistress, as she tore the offending sheet in a myriad fragments and gave it as the sport of the winds; but both she and Bernard looked to-day with a sigh of relief at the vacant place.

Breakfast finished, Claire hastened to prepare for her walk.

At the house-door she found Bernard waiting her.

"I am going with you," he said, in response to her look. "You will not refuse me!"

For answer she slipped her hand within his arm. How light its touch! He looked down upon the little delicate grey glove, and felt an almost irresistible impulse to close over it his disengaged hand.

He remembered Mona's words. Could it be that this girl cared for him! And if so—if so—

He got no further in his thought. Already his earnest gaze had brought hot blood to her very temples and set her heart so wildly beating that she broke from his side, fearing he might hear it, challenging him to a race to the edge of the cliff.

There the hut came into view. Its slight sobers them both. Silently they walked together side by side until it was reached.

The door was closed, and no answer returned to their repeated knocks for admittance.

An awful dread fell upon them both—a dread to which they dared give no utterance—as they looked into each other's white, awe-stricken faces. Again and again they knocked and called.

Within was the silence of the grave; without, the dull roar of the ocean, as if in mockery at their helplessness.

"I must enter, Mr. French," Claire said, at length. "We must break open the door."

It was not a difficult task to accomplish, yielding readily to Bernard's quite-recovered strength.

A sad picture presented itself as the interior of the hut was disclosed. Mona was not there; but, half sitting, half crouched, in the further end of the miserable room was the wretched woman who had been Rob Foster's wife, the light of reason for ever fled from her eyes, which were fastened upon a string of superb diamonds which she held lovingly in her hands, passing them to and fro to catch every passing sunbeam, and smiling vacantly at their dancing reflection, while now and then her lips moved, to utter the words:

"Glass—glittering glass!"

They could do nothing there—only send help to the wretched woman, and have her carried to some place where she would be properly cared for, for Mona's sake.

But where was Mona! It was all in vain to ask this poor, deluded creature. She looked harmless enough now; but what fiercer spell of

insanity had preceded this childlike innocence! Suppose that Mona had fallen its victim? Claire sobbed aloud.

Gently Bernard took her hand and led her from the hut.

"Trust to me!" he said. "I must do what can be done for this poor creature. Then in some way I will find and bring you news. Will you go home and wait! I wish it."

Did he know that his words were a command! In the library at Sea View Claire waited his coming. It was fully three hours before she heard his welcome step. Then she rose up, pale and trembling, to meet him.

"It is well," he said. "Fear nothing. Mona is unharmed. She has gone back to the city. I have learned that she was seen this morning at the railway station."

"But what will she do, alone and helpless? Oh, Bernard, why did I let her go?"

Unconsciously, in her grief, his name escaped her. Its utterance thrilled him with tender, loving pity.

Here, in this room, this girl had nursed him back to life. Had he the right to withhold from her any happiness which he might bring?

"Claire!" he said—and something in his first utterance of her name calmed while it startled her. "Claire," he repeated, "we will find Mona, for we will seek her together. But first I have a confession to make to my little nurse, and I want her to be very patient with me while she listens. I am going to ask you to-day for a very sacred right, and then, hand in hand, we will go forth together to seek this poor girl; but it is to be heart to heart, as well as hand in hand. I loved her once—you know that, dear; I would not try to conceal from you the truth—loved her as perhaps I have not yet learned to love you; but, Claire, you know as well that I would not ask you to share my life if I did not feel that I could offer you the heart you deserved. Day by day you have found your way into channels I thought for ever closed. I do not merit it, dear. Heaven knows I am not worthy of it; but if you will give me the sunshine of your love it shall never be clouded by any act of mine."

The colour had faded from Claire's cheeks when he had finished, and her voice was very quiet as she answered him,—

"I am sorry that you have spoken, Mr. French. It is your pity that you have offered me, not your love. Yes, you loved Mona; you love her now. Do you think me so mean, so spiteful, as to begrudge it to her! No, no! I can understand how impossible it would be to love another girl while she was here! And I—I have loved you! Yes, I will confess it! My poor little secret was but badly kept; but my love is not so hateful a thing that I should begrudge you any happiness, even though given by another. I could bear it better than to wake some day to find myself your wife in name, but not in heart. No, no—a thousand times no! Anything but that!" and she covered her face with her hands.

Gently he drew them down, and held them in his own strong clasp.

"Do you think I would ask that, Claire! My life would be very desolate without you. Each day in your sunny presence brings keener realization of this truth. Mona does not love me. She has told me so. She loves another—the man who betrayed me, and who is unworthy of her. But, Claire, she shall share our home, our hearts, as you, my darling, will be of that home its queen, and reign sole monarch of your husband's heart."

"No, Bernard! We will forget what you have said to-day. We will put it from us utterly. But you will help me look for Mona, and let my poor little secret rest in its grave. The day will come, perhaps, when it will be content to rest there."

"The day shall come when you will give me a different answer. Meantime, I will try to be patient, and to wait."

But Claire, though she listened with a little thrill of happiness she could not quite control, said, quietly,—

"When, love, not pity, pleads. Then, Bernard, but not until then, though it should never be."

(To be continued.)

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FACETIÆ.

"It was a case of love at first sight, was it not?" "Yes—at his first sight of her bank account."

JINKS has been out the night before, and is late at his desk. Employer (sternly)—Well! Jinks—Not very, sir.

MRS. BENHAM: "I'm sorry I married a fool." Benham: "Don't worry about it; you couldn't have married anything but a fool!"

CURATE (to parish choir, practising the anthem): "Now we'll begin again at the 'Hallelujah,' and please linger longer on the 'Lu!'"

DOLLY SWIFT: "Miss Oldgal holds her age wonderfully, doesn't she?" Sally Gay: "Oh, yes! She has been holding it at twenty-six ever since I can remember."

MRS. NEWED: "Was I nervous, dear, during the ceremony?" Her Friend: "Well, a trifle at first, darling; but not after William had said 'yes.'"

FRIEND: "What style of architecture did you say your house was to be?" "Mr. Crowe Doyle: 'Italian reminiscence is what the architect calls it.'"

WATSON: "I don't know anything more disagreeable than a man who will not do what he can." Jones: "Oh, he is not in it with the fellow who insists on doing what he can't."

PATIENT: "I'm feeling wretched, doctor. I take no interest in anything, have no appetite, can't sleep—" Doctor: "Why don't you marry the girl?"

ROBERT (to Tommie, who has just been spanked): "Tommie!" Thomas: "Yes!" Robert: "Don't you wish you were an iron-clad?"

WIGGLE: "How long did you know your wife before you married her, Satupon?" Satupon (mournfully): "I didn't know her at all till I married her."

EDITOR (testily): "I can't see anything in that manuscript of yours." Struggling Author (vindictively): "I presume not; but, you know, some of your readers may be quite intelligent."

BOY: "Mr. Smitters wants to know if you'll lend him an umbrella! He says you know him." Gent: "You may say that I do know him. He will probably understand why you didn't bring the umbrella!"

MR. J.: "What would you suggest, doctor, for insomnia?" Dr. Pillsbury: "I would suggest that you attempt to sit up with a sick man and give him his medicine every hour for a few nights."

MINA (whispering to her mother): "Mummie, isn't Colonel Grimshaw ugly?" The Colonel: "Don't you know, my little girl, that it is rude to whisper in company!" Mina: "Well, it would be ruder to say it out loud!"

"You look sad, Percy." "Yes, dear boy. Just met Bounder and his wife cycling, walked my hat to the wife and said: 'How do old man!' to Bounder." "Well?" "But I'm afraid I've mixed em."

MAUDIE: "Just see what my Harry has sent me for a Christmas present—a string of pearls, and for each year of my life a pearl!" Vera: "He is generous. That is very nice. Why, it will go twice round your neck!"

PHILANTHROPIST: "Do you believe in capital punishment, may I ask?" Cynde: "I certainly don't." "Why, how's that?" "Because I never yet met a man that I thought it worth while hanging another for."

THEATRICAL-GOER (looking over diagram): "I will take this seat." Box keeper: "One of the pillars is directly in front of that seat, sir." Theatre-Goer: "So I observed. I prefer a pillar to a high hat."

MAUDE: "Oh, Clara, I've just bought the loveliest pink shawl for a Christmas present." Clara: "Yes; who are you going to give it to?" Maude: "I don't know. It's so pretty, I think I will keep it myself."

YOUNG DOCTOR: "Congratulate me, Henry, I have secured my first patient." Henry (a solicitor): "I do, my boy; but don't forget me when he wants his will prepared."

"I WOULDN'T have refused that young man if I'd been you," said a maiden aunt to a young and frisky niece. "I don't think I would either if I'd been you," retorted the saucy maiden.

PROFESSOR WIGWAG: "What is a savage?" Willie Winkle: "One who does not possess the benefits of civilisation." Professor Wigwag: "And what is civilisation?" Willie: "The art of concealing the fact that one is a savage."

SMYTHE: "I dropped a halfpenny in front of a blind beggar to-day to see if he'd pick it up." Tompkins: "Well, did he?" Smythe: "Not a bit of it! He said, 'Make it a sixpence, governor, and I'll forget myself.'"

"GEORGE," she said, in a nervous whisper, "you must give me time—you must give me time. 'How long?' he hoarsely asked; 'a day, a week, a month, a year?' 'No—no, George,' and she quickly scanned the sky; 'only until the moon gets behind a cloud.'"

MR. PINKIE (10 P.M.): My dear, the doctor says a brisk walk before going to bed will ensure sleep to insomnia sufferers like myself." Mrs. Pinkie: "Well, my dear, I will clear the room so that you can walk. You may as well carry the baby with you."

AGATHA: "I believe you call yourself an advanced woman, dear!" Aletha: "Yes, love." Agatha (sweetly): "Then you may tip the waiter, dear."

"I HAVE noticed, Clara," said the fond father, "that young Meanboy has spent a good deal of time with you lately." His daughter sighed. "You are right, dad," she answered; "but that is about all he has spent."

SHE: "Who is that frightful-looking woman behind you who is talking with a man?" He: "It's my wife." She: "But you haven't looked round to see whom I mean." He: "Oh, your description is enough!"

"GOODS at half price," said the sign. "How much for that teapot?" asked an old lady. "Two shillings, mum," was the response. "I'll take it," she said, throwing down a shilling. The sign was taken in.

MRS. KNOWIT: "Mrs. Strongmind is gradually developing her husband into an ideal man. He does everything now just as she wants him to." Mrs. Sharper: "Yes, and when she has him perfect she will despise him because he didn't have a mind of his own!"

PRESIDENT NICKELIN SLOT COMPANY: "How were the profits this month?" Treasurer: "Less than usual. The receipts were not much greater than the expenses." President: "Humph! Some of the machines must have been in order."

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SOCIETY.

THE Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse have abandoned their trip to Russia and are going to Cairo. The Hereditary Prince of Coburg, who is in a very delicate state of health, will accompany them, and the party intend to go for a long voyage up the Nile.

CROWN PRINCE WILLIAM of Germany is now in his eighteenth year, and his royal father proposes that when he is a little older he shall travel. Among the countries he will visit is the United States.

THE Empress Frederick worked a bit of carpet on which all her children knelt when confirmed; the Emperor Frederick's coffin rested upon it; the present German Emperor and the Princesses Charlotte, Sophia and Victoria were married standing on it.

IN spite of the sorrow and distress which the Princess of Wales has undergone consequent on the death of her mother, she is now looking stronger and better than she has done for a long time. The quiet of her Norfolk home always suits her to perfection, and her enforced absence from festivities is extremely to her liking. She looks younger than ever in her perfectly-cut mourning gowns; these are made with extreme simplicity.

FROM his mother's family the Tear has inherited that great love for animals which is such a marked characteristic of his aunt the Princess of Wales. He has now entirely given up all forms of "sport" which involve the needless slaughter of birds and beasts, and it is said that he is most particular that his two little daughters should be taught to be kind to their pets, which are numerous.

Both the Tear and Tzaritzza are highly accomplished musicians, and devote a great deal of their leisure time to cultivating this delightful art; but outside their immediate *entourage* it is not generally known that his Majesty is the possessor of a really charming tenor voice, which, though not very powerful, is extremely sweet, and has been most carefully cultivated, and that his rendering of ballads is so good that many professional singers might copy him with advantage.

THE Prince of Wales, one of the most democratic of men, shakes hands, constantly surprising with his geniality many an acquaintance who would otherwise merely have bowed. At Levée he shakes hands with any who are presented, if he knows them even slightly. The more autocratic rulers, such as the Tzar and the Kaiser, never shake hands with any subject. They have a modern dislike to the servility of hand-kissing, though Court etiquette demands much of it from the Tzar. A slight inclination of the head usually acknowledges the obeisance of those who pass before them.

It is customary every Christmas for several of the crowned heads of Europe to send her Majesty the Queen certain table delicacies, each of which is naturally a speciality of his or her own respective country, and the gifts were duly sent to Osborne for the festive season. The gift of the Emperor of Germany to his grandmother took the form of a magnificent bear's head, which is looked upon as a national delicacy in Germany; and that of the Empress Frederick consisted of pfeffer kuchen, a kind of light gingerbread of which the late Prince Consort was particularly fond. The Tzar of Russia, in accordance with a very ancient custom, presented an enormous sterlet; and the Emperor of Austria sent a dozen bottles of Imperial Tokay. Following the example of his Majesty the Kaiser, the King of Saxony offered a bear's head; and from the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin the Queen received a large goose-liver patty, a delicious but rather rich pie, high in favour in the Fatherland; while her Majesty's granddaughter, the Crown Princess of Greece, never fails to order large quantities of spice and dried fruits to be sent to Windsor in time for Christmas.

STATISTICS.

FIFTY per cent. of heat in an ordinary fire goes up the chimney.

EIGHTY SIX per cent. of railway tickets issued are for third-class.

ACCORDING to population, nearly twice as much coal is used in this as in any other country.

EXPERIMENTS seem to show that a large ocean steamer, going at 19 knots an hour, will move more than two miles after its engines have been stopped and reversed.

GEMS.

WE do nothing well till we learn our worth, nothing best till we forget it.

OF all virtues magnanimity is the rarest; there are a hundred persons of merit for one who willingly acknowledges it in another.

EDUCATION begins at the mother's knee, and every word spoken within the hearing of little children tends towards the formation of their character.

EXPERIENCE of life makes us sure of one thing which we do not try to explain—that the sweetest happiness we ever know comes not from love, but from sacrifice, from the effort to make others happy.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

STEWED SWEETBREADS—Soak, skin, and well wash the sweetbreads in warm water; put them into a stewpan with one pint of veal broth, flavour with pepper, salt, marjoram, and a very little mace. They should stew for at least half an hour. Put the sweetbreads on a hot dish and stand them in a warm place; strain the liquor in which they have been cooked, thicken it with the beaten yolks of two eggs, stirring it steadily over the fire; let it simmer for a moment, pour it over the dish and send up at once.

APRICOT FRITTERS—Drain the syrup from a can of apricots, bring it to the boiling point, add one-half of a cupful of sugar and one tablespoonful of corn-starch dissolved in a little cold water. Stir until clear and thick, drop in an inch stick of cinnamon, and simmer for five minutes. Beat together the yolk of one egg and one-quarter of a cupful of cold water; add one-half of a cupful of flour, one-quarter of a teaspoonful of salt, one teaspoonful of powdered sugar and one-half of a teaspoonful of olive oil and beat until smooth. Whip the white of the egg to a stiff, dry froth, stir lightly into the batter and set away in a cool place for at least two hours. Have ready a kettle of smoking hot fat. Dip each piece of drained fruit into the batter, drop into the hot fat and cook golden brown. Drain for a moment on unglazed paper and serve with the sauce.

CASTLE PUDDINGS—Six large sharp apples, one lemon, two teaspoonfuls of bread-crumbs, one teaspoonful of suet, quarter of a teaspoonful of salt, quarter of a teaspoonful of nutmeg, one egg, and half a teaspoonful of carbonate of soda. Peel, core, and finely chop the apples. Mix them with the bread-crumbs, nutmeg, salt, and chopped suet, and the grated rind of the lemon and half the juice. Beat up the egg and stir it in. Mix the carbonate of soda with about one teaspoonful of milk or water. Stir it in thoroughly. Put the mixture into a well-buttered mould or basin. Twist a piece of buttered paper over the top. Stand it in a saucepan with boiling water to come half-way up the mould, and steam for four hours. Take care the water does not boil away, or the pudding will burn. When done, turn out carefully on to a hot dish, and either pour some hot custard round, or melt and use four tablespoonfuls of apple jelly.

MISCELLANEOUS.

RED HAired people are not so apt to become bald as those who possess hair of a different hue.

It is said that the great lack of sunshine in England is the cause of the rather low spirits of Englishwomen as contrasted with those of other nations.

In certain parts of Africa crickets constitute an article of commerce. People rear them, feed them in confinement, and sell them. The natives are very fond of their music, being under the impression that it induces sleep.

A LARGE paper house with sixteen rooms has been erected by a Russian gentleman at his country seat. The house was constructed in New York by an American engineer, and cost 80,000 roubles. Its architect declares it will last longer than a stone building.

BREES are said to have such an antipathy to dark-coloured objects that black chickens have been stung to death, while white ones of the same brood were untouched, and a man in a black high hat is rarely stung, on account of the attention the bees give to the hat.

NEARLY all the comic valentines, used in February in almost every part of the civilised world, are made in Germany, in some parts of which country the work goes on from one end of the year to the other. One factory turns out more than 10,000,000 of the "comics" in a year.

A WOMAN inventor has constructed a table which waits upon itself. The table is round, and the stationary space for plates, &c., is about ten inches wide. Within this circle is a revolving disc an inch or two higher than the stationary part. On this the food is placed, and a simple turn will bring the desired article within reach.

THE throne-room of the Sultan at Constantinople is a gorgeous sight. The gilding is unequalled, and from the ceiling hangs a superb Venetian chandelier, the 200 lights of which make a gleam like that of a veritable sun. The throne is a huge seat covered with red velvet and having arms and back of pure gold.

It is said that one of the West India Islands is inhabited exclusively by turtles, some of which grow to an enormous size. Attempts to establish human habitations on the island have always failed. The turtles undermine the foundations of the houses, and not infrequently attack the inmates.

IN 1669, Soliman Agu, Ambassador from the Sultan Mahomet IV., arrived in Paris, and established the custom of drinking coffee. A Greek of the name of Pasque, opened a coffee-house in London as early as 1652. The first mention of coffee in our statute book is Anno 1660, when a duty of fourpence was laid upon every gallon of coffee made and sold.

PERHAPS it is not generally known that Mohammedans never use printed Korans, because in doubt as to the ingredients entering into the composition of the printing-ink. They are afraid of being defiled by taking into their hands a copy of the sacred book that may have been produced with the ink in which pig's-fat, instead of linseed oil, has formed one of the component parts. They therefore confine themselves to reading handwritten reproductions of the prophet's work, which are naturally very expensive.

THE Kafir wife is a hard worker. She not only tills in the garden, growing the Kafir corn, but in a thousand other ways is much more industrious than her lord. She is sometimes so over-burdened with work that she will say to her husband: "It is only fair that you should take another wife to help me in the work. I have been a good working woman, for my industry and thrift obtained the means to enable you to acquire much cattle. As your riches come through me, and the cattle were brought by my earnings you should expend some in a fresh marriage contract, and lighten my labours." The man is generally agreeable to fall in with her proposals, and as the Kafir women who are wives of the same man agree well together, jealousy is seldom exhibited.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ADMINISTRATOR.—Lord Kitchener was born in 1850.

ARTIST.—"Athlete" is Irish, and means "my darling."

TWICE WED.—After the second marriage, it is customary to wear both rings.

A. T.—Application should be made to the magistrates to have the indentures cancelled.

A. F. S.—A few grains of borax put into the milk will prevent it from turning sour.

MOTHER HUBBARD.—Preserved cherries are very nice either as well as, or instead of, the peach.

MURDERER.—Unless his offence has been one which you cannot overlook, forgive him.

DISCONTENTED.—There is no legal provision for altering the name by which you were registered.

BRIGHTENED BEAUTY.—Moles cannot be removed without leaving a scar or discolouration of the skin.

A FAILURE.—Only death, or a divorce can dissolve the marriage contract between husband and wife.

BEES.—Wring a cloth well with strong turpentine, and put among woollen goods. This kills the moths.

BYE.—There is no difference in point of validity between marriage in church and marriage at a registrar's office.

SEAN STRUCK.—William Terris was assassinated at the stage door of the Adelphi Theatre, London, on December 16th, 1897.

INNOCENT.—A kindergarten is a school in which children are taught by means of games and toys, and drilled to music and singing.

ARGUMENT.—There is no truth whatever in the belief that anyone falling into the sea necessarily rises and sinks three times before drowning.

BIDENGOOM.—It is necessary that you should have been resident for at least twenty-one days in the parish in which the banns are to be proclaimed.

R. E.—Rubbing daily with a freshly-cut raw potato sometimes has the desired effect, and you may use raw beef instead of the potato if you prefer it.

A CONSTANT READER.—Try sprinkling borax in and around all the holes from which they come. This will drive them away in time if you persevere.

NEARVOUS.—When a gentleman meets a lady in the street, the recognition should first proceed from her, unless indeed, they are on very intimate terms.

SUFFERER.—The white of an egg beaten up to a froth with two tablespoonfuls of rose-water is a capital lotion; it should be applied on a soft rag, changing as it grows dry.

MANIK.—Nearly all Russian leather is tanned with birch bark. This gives it the peculiarly pleasant odour which is so admired, and at the same time protects it from insects.

JELLY.—One tablespoonful of powdered borax to a pint of water would be sufficient. Do not use soda, and for no fabric should you use it in the inordinate quantity you suggest.

LAMP-GHOUT.—Earth is the best extinguisher for a fire caused by paraffin; if an accident happen by the exploding or upsetting of a lamp, throw earth on the flame at once.

C. M. E.—The "freedamp" of the miners is light carburetted hydrogen gas, which is highly inflammable. "Chokedamp" is carbonic acid gas, or, as it is now called, carbon dioxide.

NUBER.—An excellent remedy for a burn or scald is to put a little carbonate of soda on a piece of soft linen and bind it round the burn or scald as this will relieve the pain greatly.

WORKING MOTHER.—With careful training the lisping would disappear. When there is no malformation, and the teeth are perfect, stammering and lisping may be cured by perseverance.

ROSA.—Turn up the chair bottom; wash the cane-work thoroughly with soapy water and a clean cloth. Let it dry in the air, and it will be as firm as new, providing the cane has not been broken.

BEST.—Clean steel fireproofs with a paste made by mixing together equal quantities of whiting and brick dust, moistened with paraffin. Apply this to the steel with an old cloth, and afterwards polish.

T. S.—It is impossible for you to learn to play the piano without a teacher, and there are no books we know of that would help you. A competent teacher could soon correct the faults you speak of.

ADAM.—The name "Adam's apple" originated from the ancient superstitious tradition that a piece of the forbidden fruit which Adam ate in the Garden of Eden stuck in his throat and produced the swelling.

WORKING GIRL.—We should not advise you to leave until you are sure of obtaining something better. The objections you mention are slight in comparison to what you might have to put up with in many places.

T. S.—Decide upon the department to which you desire to apply yourself, and then consult the best teacher of that branch which you can secure. Follow his or her advice implicitly, and let him or her decide upon whether or not you are too old to achieve success.

BUSTY BEZ.—Stockings and all silk underwear should be washed in warm soapsuds to which ammonia has been added in the proportion of one teaspoonful to a gallon. Rinse in clear lukewarm water, and dry, without wringing.

CARELESS.—Immediately ink has been spilled on an article of linen place it in some new milk, rubbing all the time. Should the stain not entirely disappear, warm more milk, and let the article soak several hours.

CORIGUE.—Oysters, after they have been brought away from the sea, know by instinct the exact hour when the tide is rising and approaching their beds, and so, of their own accord, open their shells to receive their food from the sea.

BREAV.—Soap should never be rubbed on the handkerchiefs themselves. Take a little of soap and water, soak them in this, let soak for half an hour, then wash without more soap, and rinse in the usual way. If treated in this way, they will not turn yellow.

GUMAR.—Salt and vinegar make an excellent solution for cleansing bedroom water-bottles or wine-decanter. A despoisoned of rough salt put into the wine-decanter moistened with vinegar and well shaken generally removes all stains.

AMBER.—A mistress cannot be summoned for refusing to give a servant a character, nor for giving an unfavourable one; but if in the latter case it can be proved that the character is false, and has been given from malice an action for libel will lie.

INDIGNANT ONE.—If you do not want to continue your engagement, you should frankly tell the gentleman so. You, of course have a right to insist on its being fulfilled, or else discontinued. Your betrothed has no more right to pay attention to other ladies than you have to receive attention from other gentlemen.

A SPANISH SONG.

BERONITA, red thy lips
As the roses in the south;
Is it you or may that slip
Bird-like from thy dimpled mouth?
Captive to thy sorcery,
O cruel kindness dost thou show;
Sweetheart, if thou lovest not me,
Break the spell and let me go.

Berónica, dark thy hair,
Gleaming with imprisoned light
Like a subtle, shining snare,
Tangled fast my dreams by night.
Sleep or waking, still to thee
All my fevered thoughts do flow;
Sweetheart, if thou lovest not me,
Break the spell and let me go.

Berónica, soft thine eyes,
Lustrous, fair, and jetty-fringed,
Like twin stars that gem the skies
When the dawn is rose-tinted;
Cease, ah! cease thy coquetry,
Teach their rays a warmer glow;
Sweetheart, if thou lovest not me,
Break the spell and let me go.

HOPES LOVE.—We admit that your case is very hard, but you would not improve it by taking such a step as you contemplate, as there would at least be the continual fear of the return of your husband, and consequent trouble and sorrow for those you care for most.

CONSTANT READER.—The pillory was a scaffold for persons to stand on, to render them publicly infamous, that all might avoid and refuse to have any dealings with them. The punishment was awarded against persons who were convicted of forgery, perjury, libelling, &c.

PUZZLED.—Mr Walter Scott's novels are called the "Waverley Novels" because the only clue to the author of the first editions was the mention "By the author of Waverley," the first of the novels was published anonymously, and for years the author's identity was maintained.

JACK OF ALL TRADES.—The cane bottoms of chairs can be rendered tight again by moistening the cane seat thoroughly with very hot water by means of a sponge, and washing off so that the cane work becomes completely soaked. Then place the chair in the open air, or better still in a strong draught and allow to dry.

W. J.—Of course, it would be very discourteous to smoke in the presence of ladies without first asking if they objected to the fumes of tobacco. Indeed, unless on intimate terms with the ladies, a gentleman should not attempt to smoke without first receiving an invitation to do so, and then he should make quite sure it is agreeable to all parties present.

F. M.—A method for making wine from unripe grapes is as follows:—The grapes should be suffered to remain on the vine as long as there is a chance of their ripening; then remove them carefully from the stalks, separating the mouldy and rotten from them. To form a must resembling the must of ripe fruit an additional quantity of water must be added to the unripe fruit. A proportion of two pound of sugar per gallon will yield a light wine but not durable; three pound of sugar a wine equal in strength to champagne. The more sugar the more fruit must be used.

F. M.—Mix together in a pan over the fire two parts of tallow and one part of resin; warm the boots and apply the hot mixture with a painter's brush until they will not absorb any more. If the boots be well polished before the application of the waterproofing, they will polish afterwards.

S. H.—Make and bake an undercrust. Meanwhile, put in a nice stewpan juice and little grated peel of one lemon, one cup of sugar, one teaspoonful of cornstarch, yolks of two eggs, and a small piece of butter. Stir this till it boils, then pour into the crust. Beat whites of eggs to a foam, sweeten and flavour a little; pour it over the pie, and brown slightly in the oven.

R. H.—The obelisk originally represented a ray of sun—the sun having been worshipped as the Supreme Spirit. They were erected in pairs, usually at the entrance to the temple; sometimes they supported a disc of the sun, and stood upon a pyramid, that combination presumably representing resurrection—life from the tomb. There were priests of the obelisk.

ALGUMENTATIVE.—Your friend is quite right; there is no Mikado. The Emperor of Japan is known as "Tenno Hei Ka," which means "His Imperial Majesty." Thus the people of Japan address their sovereign in exactly the same manner as do the subjects of the Kaiser. It is true "Mikado" used at one time to be the title. It has, however, fallen into abeyance for several generations.

FANTE.—The term "El Dorado" was not originally used to designate any particular place; it signifies "the gilded" or "the golden," and was variously applied. According to some authorities, it was used to designate a religious ceremony of the natives who covered the anointed body with gold dust. On that account the whole of Guiana was at one time known by the name "El Dorado."

ALF.—Earthquakes are subterranean disturbances propagated through the earth in a series of elastic waves. How they originate is not clearly known. Many are associated with volcanic action, while just as many occur without any evidence of such association. The earliest recorded eruption of Vesuvius, and one of the most fatal, took place in the year 79 of the Christian era. On this occasion the cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii were overwhelmed and lost, together with the greater part of their inhabitants.

E. S. D.—The expression is used in reference to a person who is in continual expectation of some great misfortune befalling him, and does not know what minute the blow may fall. The expression owes its origin to the following story:—Damonides was one of the courtiers of Dionysius, the Elder, and had flattered the latter on being a rich king, whereupon Dionysius, wishing to illustrate to him the uncertainty of such happiness, seated Damonides at a banquet, with a naked sword suspended above his head by a single hair.

D. D.—Collect all the tiny morsels, and with an old knife cut them in tiny shavings. These should be kept in an old jar. When the jar is nearly full, pour a cupful of hot water into it, set in a saucepan of boiling water, and stir until the soap is entirely dissolved to about the thickness of honey, then pour it into a tin box, which should be kept for the purpose. Leave until quite cold, then bend back the sides of the box, when the soap can be easily removed in a nice firm block. Cut it in neat pieces, and keep it in a dry place till required.

WORRIED.—The best remedy is to apply turpentine freely, to the places they are believed to infest. Some good housekeepers strew brown paper in turpentine and fasten it underneath all the furniture, whilst others put powdered bitter apple and pieces of camphor into various corners of sofas, arm chairs, &c. Things to be packed away should be well sprinkled with alum, dried to a powder and powdered, bitter apple or pepper. It is well to adopt different remedies at intervals; after a time the moths appear to overcome their objections to any particular one.

MILK.—Coffee stains may be removed from table-linen by soaking the part for twelve hours or so in clear cold water, softened with a good pinch of borax. Another treatment is necessary for the removal of tea or fruit stains. If the linen is washed or put into cold water in the first instance, the stains become net, and can then only be taken out by soaking the affected part for several days in sour milk or with salts of lemon. In order to avoid all this trouble, simply pour boiling water over the stain till it disappears, which it will do if the stain is fresh. The same treatment applies to fruit stains.

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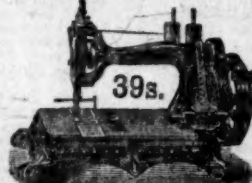
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